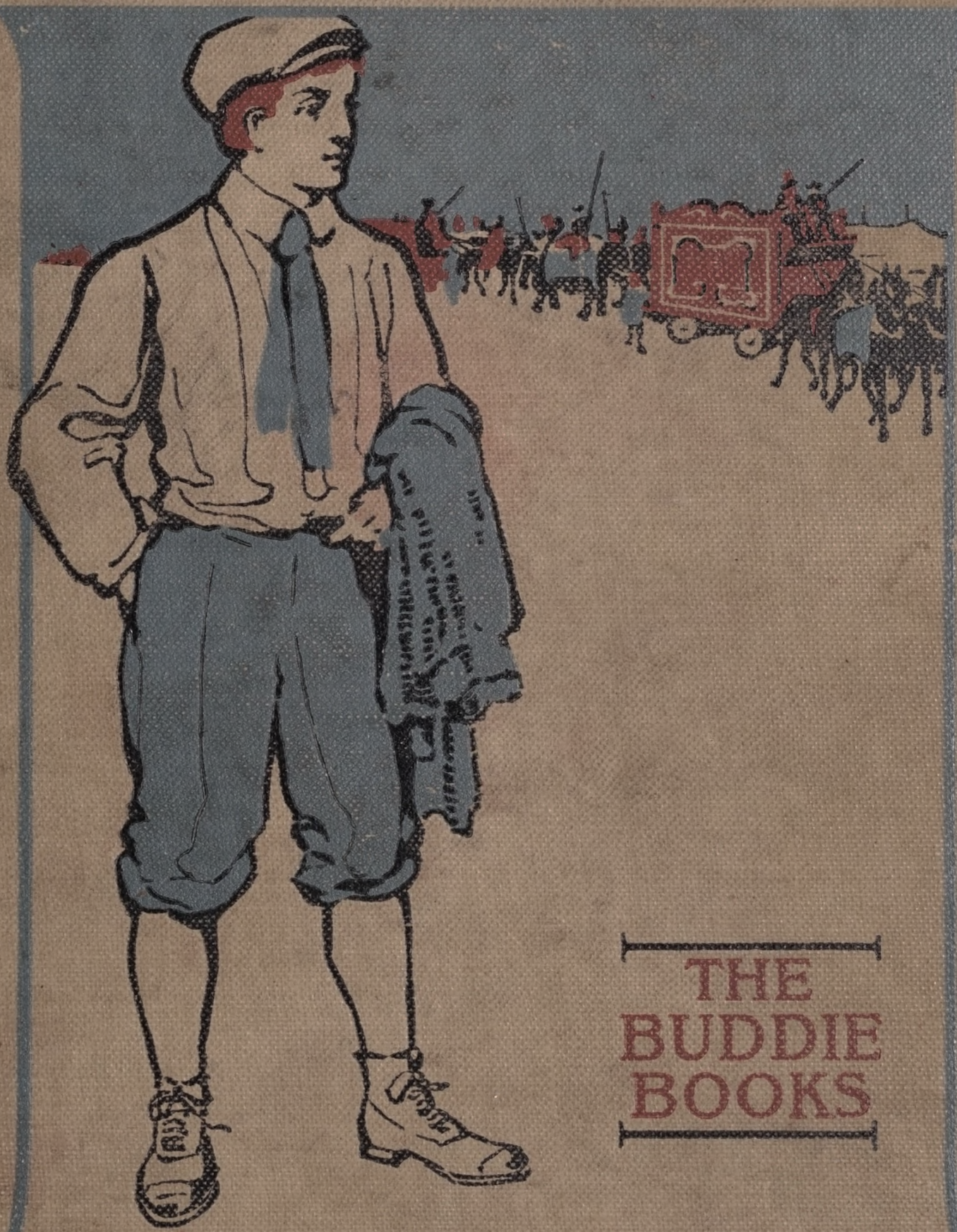
# BUDDIE

## THE STORY OF A BOY



THE BUDDIE BOOKS

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

Class P27

Book R21B

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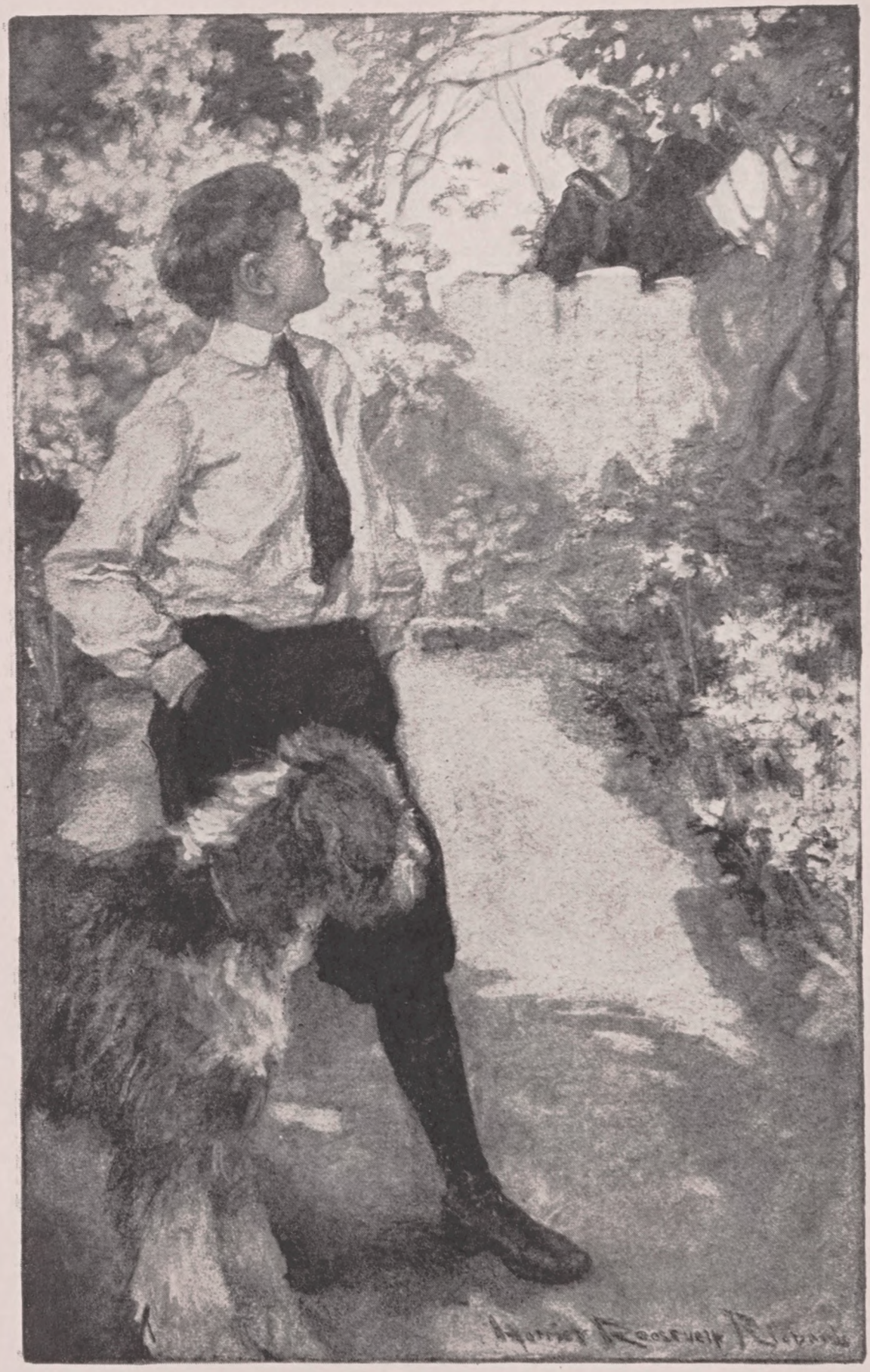


"That 's too bad. I thought you came in by Castle Garden, not by Plymouth Rock."

FRONTISPIECE. *See page 29.*

The Buddie Books

# BUDDIE

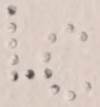
## THE STORY OF A BOY

BY

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

AUTHOR OF THE "TEDDY" BOOKS, THE "SIDNEY" BOOKS, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY
HARRIET ROOSEVELT RICHARDS



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# CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| I | Daddy | 1 |
| II | The New Home | 14 |
| III | The Girl Next Door | 26 |
| IV | Buddie's New School | 40 |
| V | Pet-Lamb and Ebenezer | 53 |
| VI | Aunt Julia's Dinner Party | 65 |
| VII | The Boys' Sport | 78 |
| VIII | The Arrival of the Circus | 91 |
| IX | In the Strawberry Bed | 105 |
| X | Vacation | 119 |
| XI | Sandy's Surprise Party | 132 |
| XII | Pet-Lamb's Bath | 144 |
| XIII | Daddy's Letters | 157 |
| XIV | The Boy Scouts' Rifles | 170 |
| XV | Buddie's First Novel | 184 |
| XVI | The Regatta | 196 |
| XVII | Buddie's Surprise | 209 |
| XVIII | Ebenezer and the Bishop | 223 |
| XIX | The Burglars | 236 |
| XX | The Rifle Match | 250 |
| XXI | Ebenezer Makes Good | 262 |
| XXII | Buddie's Christmas Gift | 276 |

# ILLUSTRATIONS

"That 's too bad. I suppose you came in by Castle Garden, not by Plymouth Rock" *Frontispiece*

The chariots, though, were covered; the beasts, for the most part, invisible . . . . . *Page* 99

Buddie entered by way of the window sill . . . " 147

The Bishop arrived just in season for afternoon tea . . . . . " 226

# BUDDIE:

## THE STORY OF A BOY

### CHAPTER ONE

#### DADDY

"ALL the boys that go to our school are awful milksops; that is, except the teacher. I don't know, though, but she is the worst one of all," Buddie explained to his father from above his arithmetic, one evening.

Fate had dealt with Buddie malignly, in that it had sent him out into the world, the chuckling world, named Ernest Angell. To be sure, there had always been an Ernest in the Angell family, just as there had always been a doctor; and Buddie's mother, whose sense of humour had been far less than was her sense of loyalty to all that concerned her husband's clan, had insisted upon carrying out the family tradition. Buddie had gone to the baptismal font, an innocent and nameless babe, treated with universal respect. He had come away again, labelled in a fashion to justify the kickings of his worsted-booted heels, a source of merriment to anybody who paused to chuck him underneath the chin and ask him, —

"Wot 's 'oo's name, itty pet?"

The sentimental smile and the cooing tones both vanished, before the answer of the nurse. At first, Buddie crowed lustily, in sympathy with the unfailing laugh which followed. Later on, the laugh had displeased him. Realizing its cause, its total justification in the fact, he had set to work to undo the associations so painfully apparent in his name.

"A fellow can't help it, if his great grandmother did n't have any more sense than a treetoad," he asserted to a chaffing mate. "Puritans did n't; that's what ailed them. And, anyhow, I'd sooner be Ernest Angell than Algernon Tod, any day in the week. Besides, at home they call me Buddie; and if any fellow here but the teacher ever calls me anything else, I'll give him the worst licking that ever was."

The schoolmate ceased to chaff, and gazed uneasily at the muscular, red-headed youngster before him, a youngster puffing himself out like a turkey cock and manifestly eager for the fray. Then he decided to temporize.

"But, if it's your name?" he began slowly.

Buddie cut him off, cut him off promptly and ungrammatically.

" 'T aint, if it don't fit. Use it, and you'll get what's coming to you." And Buddie swung himself about and turned away.

It was Buddie's first day in the new school, and the explanation was needed, by way of starting things upon a proper basis. Later, had Buddie only possessed himself in patience, the matter would have adjusted itself without an explanation. No one, after ten hours in the society of Buddie, ever, ever would have dreamed of addressing him as

Ernest Angell. No one, that is, but Teacher. She had the responsibilities of her position; but even she, out of hours, fell from grace and dubbed him Buddie. And, after all, the suitability of the nickname was more a matter of pure theory than of fact. Buddie was brother to no mortal thing. An only child, he was the torment of his nurse, the boon companion of his frowsy dog, and the constant joy and comrade of his father whose young wife had died when Buddie still was in the red and flabby stage of backboneless babyhood. Buddie still was red; however, nowadays, he was by no means flabby.

From the days of his kindergarten onward, Buddie had betrayed his long heritage of Yankee ingenuity in devising mischief. It was Buddie who, in that kindergarten, had persisted in developing his colour work in mingled patches of dark blue and royal purple, or else in deep pink and orange, patches which shrieked defiance at each other; Buddie who had built his castles upon such insecure foundations that they invariably toppled over upon the structures of his neighbours, just at the very instant when those neighbours were demanding approbation from the teacher. It was Buddie who added a fistful of tadpoles and a small, crawly turtle to the globe of goldfish; Buddie who squeezed a long, curly thread of paste out of the tube and into the box of wools and bits of perforated paper. A little later on, when real, true school had taken the place of kindergarten games, it was Buddie who first saw the possibilities of the string-bag in which Teacher the Second kept her rubbers, and substituted for those rubbers a brace of blindly squirming kittens.

The kittens promptly embraced the meshes of the bag with their spotty paws, and, although wailing loudly for their absent mamma, yet refused to be dislodged until Teacher the Second attacked the question — and also the bag — with shears. Buddie took his punishment like a man, stoutly affirming that it was well worth the while, in view of what had gone before.

It was Buddie, too, who, working swiftly and from the underside, filled the schoolroom sponges up with whitewash, and then amicably gave way to his mates in the daily strife as to which one of them should be allowed to clean the blackboards. It was Buddie who put snuff in the books of his chiefest rival for headship of the school, and reduced him to a sneezing ruin on the annual exhibition day. It was Buddie who never studied, Buddie who kept the school in an uproar by his pranks, and, alas and alas for discipline, Buddie who always knew his lessons. Furthermore, also alas for discipline, Buddie kept all the rules. The only trouble lay in his resourceful brain which invented new exceptions a long way faster than his teachers could frame new rules to fit them.

All this was in school. At home, it was far different. Daddy was at home; and Daddy was always to be obeyed, Daddy whom he adored, Daddy who always understood.

He understood now. That was the best of Daddy. One could tell him facts, without wasting time in preliminary explanations.

"What was the row, to-day, Buddie?" he queried, as he let his evening paper fall across his knee.

Buddie, casting down his eyes, yet had the grace

to blush. Nevertheless, the corners of his lips belied the blush.

"How could I know Teacher did n't like hop-toads?" he asked, with as jaunty a nonchalance as he was able to assume at such short notice.

"Buddie! You did n't —" And then Daddy spoke more quietly. "I thought my son had some chivalry."

A tangle on Ebenezer's brow held Buddie's attention for an instant. Ebenezer was the bob-tailed sheep dog, and abounded in tangles. This one seemed obdurate, but at last Buddie detached himself from it, long enough to answer, —

"I don't see what chivalry has got to do with it."

"Frightening Miss Gilbert?" his father suggested.

"She was n't frightened; she only just jumped a little, same as the toad," Buddie argued, and his eyes now matched the lips below them, thin lips and sensitive, but very, very merry. "Really, Dad, you should have seen them. The toad jumped boo at her, and then she jumped boo back at him. They were just about as fat as each other, only the toad did n't have any hairpins to lose out. She's always losing hairpins. One dropped down Billy Bourne's neck inside his collar, one day when she was showing him about his fractions, and he had to get an excuse and go out into the hall quite by himself, before he could get it out again."

But Daddy refused to be decoyed along this side track of the conversation. Instead, he said Things to Buddie, quietly as was his wont, but very plainly and in a fashion that made Buddie, in after years, powerless to forget them. That done, he yielded to his curiosity.

"But where in the world did you get a toad, Buddie?" he queried, for, as a rule, hoptoads are not found strolling along the upper stretches of Madison Avenue in New York.

"I picked him up, last Saturday, when we went over to Staten Island," Buddie answered promptly.

"Where have you been keeping him ever since?" Daddy asked, while he stretched out his hand for his pipe.

The hand stayed itself, however, at the reply of Buddie who spoke without the slightest sense of having committed any indiscretion.

"In your tobacco jar. It's been empty for a few days, you know, and it made a bully house for him. It was so tight that the flies I put in for him to eat could n't get away, and so shallow that he could reach them without having to stretch his poor old legs too far. He was a perfect old grand-daddy, you know, and slow as beans. If she'd had the least bit of sense, she'd have known she need n't have been so frightened at him, when he tried to jump, even if he did strike her as being rather sudden."

It was with a sense of relief upon him that Daddy accepted the chance to abandon his pipe in favour of moral precepts. The last phrases of his precepts, however, were destined to echo long in Buddie's brain.

"It's always sneaky, Buddie, to tease an animal, or a woman. They can't strike back again; the advantage is all on your side, and it's mean to make the most of it. Have all the fun you can, as long as they can laugh with you. When they stop laughing, you generally can take it for granted

that it's time to stop. That's all for this lecture, son. Now give Ebenezer his biscuit, and then get the cribbage board. No lessons after eight o'clock, you know."

"But 'spose I flunk, to-morrow?" Buddie objected, although he banged his book together and rose with alacrity.

"Better flunk than fidget," his father responded tersely. "You've got to be healthy, whatever comes. The lessons are a secondary matter."

"I 'spose that's because you're a doctor," Buddie made thoughtful soliloquy, as he departed from the room, with Ebenezer at his heels.

But his father, left behind, became more thoughtful still. He knew too well the possibilities which Buddie had inherited from his girl mother, knew too well, also, the danger that had fallen on himself by reason of his constant and devoted attendance upon his dear girl wife. At the time, it had seemed to him the only thing for him to do. Later, however, had come another side of the question, the side that was concerning itself nowadays with his responsibilities regarding Buddie.

Buddie, going bedward with Ebenezer trudging after him, an hour later, was convinced that the game of cribbage had been the jolliest ever. And when, a few minutes afterward, he nestled down among the blankets, he sailed away to dreamland, totally unconscious that the ended evening marked an ended epoch. Ebenezer, scorning his scarlet bed upon the floor and unlawfully sprawling across his young master's feet, was no more free from any grim forebodings.

It was a good week later, a week of pranks and

of the grave responsibilities of boyhood, that, of a sudden, the forebodings materialized. All that week, Buddie had been vaguely aware that Daddy was silent, abstracted; but Buddie, with the optimism of healthy boyhood, laid the abstraction to some dangerous case or other, regretted for the dozenth time that Daddy was a doctor and at the beck and call of other people, and then ignored the matter utterly.

And then, one night, Daddy spoke, gravely, and with his eyes upon the fire.

"Buddie, never mind the lessons," he said, while he laid aside the paper at which, for upward of an hour, he had been gazing with unseeing eyes.

Nothing loath, Buddie shut his book, and went to join Ebenezer on the rug. Ebenezer, roused from puppy dreams of cats to chase and many bones, blinked sleepily, sighed, laid one raggy and apologetic paw on Buddie's arm, and once more fell asleep. Buddie stroked the tousled gray head for a minute, while he waited for his father to speak again. Then, as the silence lasted unduly long, —

"Let her go, Dad," he bade his father encouragingly.

For a whole week now, Daddy had been conning the subject which lay before him, turning it over and over in his mind, choosing now this handle and now that by which to introduce it. When it came, however, it was all wrong end first.

"Buddie," he said; "I think I'm going to — to make a change in — in your school."

Buddie, forgetful of Ebenezer, rolled over on his back to face his father more directly. The shaded reading lamp upon the table left his father's face in

shadow, but threw a strong shaft of light down on the honest, earnest freckled face, down on the boyish figure, strong and sturdy in its every limb.

"What's the row, Daddy?" he asked, in frank astonishment. "Has Teacher been on the rampage again? Honestly, I have n't been doing a thing, for more than a week."

"It is n't that, Buddie." Out of the shadow, the voice came hesitatingly.

Buddie clasped his hands behind his head and doubled up his knees.

"Then what?" he queried tersely.

"The school is all right," his father reassured him. "So are you, for that matter. Your last-month marks were the best yet. It's only that —" he cleared his throat; "that I find I've got to go away from home, for a little while."

"Jolly!" Buddie made animated assent. "I've always wanted to go a journey. Is it Europe? Or just professional? And how soon?"

His father did his best to answer the comprehensive questions as briefly as he was able. Indeed, why prolong the agony with many words?

"It's professional, but not Europe, Buddie; and it's going to be next week. The worst of it is, son," and an older listener than Buddie would have been aware that his father was stiffening in every nerve and sinew; "the very worst of it all is that I can't take you with me."

With a sudden snap, Buddie was sitting upright and gazing at his father with horrified eyes.

"Daddy!"

"Yes, son, I know."

"But we've never been apart in all our lives;

never, never! And we can't get on without each other! Daddy, you would n't?" The last words were insistent in their appeal.

"Not if I could help it, Buddie. But I can't."

"How long?" Buddie demanded.

"Six months, perhaps. Perhaps a year."

Buddie lay back again, and buried his face in Ebenezer's tousled side.

"A year is always," he muttered brokenly at length.

But his father, knowing all the danger, yet was of better courage. It might be always, he was well aware; but, if human skill should make it possible, the months would be more finite.

Nevertheless, it was long before either one of them could come down to discussing practical details. The sorrow of their parting must be faced, and they faced it, man-fashion, without many words, without much expression of endearment. And yet, each one of them was well aware of all that the other was suffering. Buddie gulped bravely, and hugged Ebenezer tight with a vague notion that Daddy would know the hugs were really meant for him. Daddy watched the boyish figure on the rug, until both figure and rug vanished in a haze. Then he arose and punched the fire to pieces. By the time he had picked up the pieces and piled them together once more, he was able to speak quite steadily.

"And now for the planning, Buddie. If I go off and leave you, you can't well stay on here."

"What then?" Buddie made listless answer.

"Before I go," his father's voice surprised him with its old-time ring, and Buddie wondered dully

whether, after all their years together, Daddy really and truly did n't care; "before I go, I am going to pack you off to Aunt Julia."

Buddie's listlessness vanished before his surprise. Once more he sat up, this time with a suddenness akin to that of his recent friend, the toad.

"Aunt Julia!"

"Yes."

"But — but maybe she won't want me," Buddie protested. "Aunt Julia is n't a person to go in much for boys."

"I think we need n't worry too much about that, Buddie," his father told him, with a calmness born of his professional need of laying down a law of life for other people. "Aunt Julia will be very kind to you, and you could n't have a better place to live than in that dear old home of hers. I had my own boyhood there, and I know all about it."

"Yes; but you won't be there with me now, and that makes all the difference," Buddie said, a bit disconsolately. "I 'd have the time of my life there, if you were another boy in the same house. But Aunt Julia! Whizzikins! She makes me feel cross-eyed in my spine. She always knows it when a fellow's boots are muddy, or when the button loses out of one end of his collar. Besides, what about Ebenezer?"

"I wrote to her that you would bring your dog with you," Daddy answered.

"Hm! You wrote. But what does she say back again?" Buddie questioned shrewdly.

If Daddy winced at the question, he did not show it. Aunt Julia was his younger sister, his half-sister, and younger by many years. She lived

in the old family home on the outskirts of a New England city, lived there alone with her servants, and her pretty clothes, and her many clubs and social hobbies. And, under her dainty rule, the old family home seemed scarcely likely to be hospitable to such a boy as Buddie, to such a dog as Ebenezer. Rather, indeed, would it have been fit dwelling place for one Ernest Angell, leading after him by a broad blue ribbon a freshly laundered poodle.

"I have n't had time to get a letter back again, Buddie; not really."

"Bet you won't. She never writes. When did your letter go?"

"Tuesday."

"Hh! And this is Monday. Still, old maids always are dead slow," Buddie made frank comment. "Perhaps she won't take me."

"I think she will."

"Wish she would n't." Buddie grumbled. "I'll have to black my shoes, every day; and wear pumps to dinner, and all that stuff and nonsense. Daddy," his fist smote sharply on the flank of Ebenezer, now rolled up in the smallest possible ball and snoring lustily; "I will not, I just will not stand for a white shirt, except on Sundays. You must make Aunt Julia take that in, once for all; or else I'll run away to sea."

The old-time laugh came back to Buddie, as he made the threat, born of the recollection of a summer visit to Aunt Julia, months on months before. The laugh began in his eyes and ended in his lips and in his round and freckled cheeks; and his father, watching, laughed in sympathy. But the

laugh died quickly out of Daddy's eyes, and, with a swift gesture, Daddy's face was buried in his hands. When he spoke, the resonance had all gone away from his voice, as he said slowly, —

"Oh, son, son! You never will know what you are to me, nor what it is for me to leave you, even for a little while."

Quite unrebuked, Ebenezer slept with his ragged head beside Buddie's on the pillow, that night, his frowsy body hugged tight in Buddie's arms. No matter what the pluck, the boyish woe had been bound to have its way; and Ebenezer, licking up the salt tears as they fell, was sure to tell no tales. Strange to say, however, it was not until Buddie was just about to fall asleep that suddenly he recollected that he had been too much absorbed in the mere fact of the separation to think to ask his father where it was that he was going. The sudden recollection almost waked him up again; almost, but not quite.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NEW HOME

LIKE many another busy professional man, Doctor Angell was a notoriously bad correspondent. Like him, only a good deal worse, was his half-sister, Miss Julia Tenney. Moreover, during her frequent absences from home, Miss Julia never took the trouble to have her letters sent on after her. Her friends that counted, knew her whereabouts, Miss Julia argued. The rest of the world did not matter in the least. Their letters could be left, piling up on her hall table to await her return and her subsequent leisurely curiosity as concerned their contents.

Her return from one such absence had occurred, that very afternoon. And now, her letters still untouched, Miss Julia was having tea in her library, preparatory to her coming tussle with the contents of her trunks. Beside her on a chair, Pet-Lamb was having tea with Miss Julia, cambric tea and very sweet, with a biscuit crumbled in, tea which befitted the delicacy of her feline nerves. Pet-Lamb was a pure white Persian pussy cat whose charted pedigree was kept between the leaves of Miss Julia's own book of genealogy. In her early youth, before Miss Julia had adopted her, Pet-Lamb had won divers blue ribbons in divers shows, a ribbon, indeed, for every show. But Miss Julia had stopped all that. Shows were neither aristocratic, nor too

cleanly, and there was always the possibility for germs. Furthermore, Miss Julia had changed her name from Rampur Fourth to Pet-Lamb, Pet-Lamb with a hyphen and the accent falling heavily upon the latter word. In passing, too, it should be added that Pet-Lamb, unlike the mail, as a general thing followed Miss Julia Tenney wherever she might go.

Pet-Lamb was absorbing her tea with stoic greed; but Miss Julia dallied with her own, tasting and pausing and tasting again. Saint Augustine had been delightful, that year, full of good old friends and charming new acquaintances. Nevertheless, it was very good to be at home once more, to settle down in the dear old house with its dainty furnishings, its luxury and, above all else, its quiet. There had been children galore at Saint Augustine, sunburnt babies in rompers and short socks, who wailed aloud and beat each other with their fists, and boys in dusty boots, who tried experiments on Pet-Lamb's nervous system. At the memory, Miss Julia nestled closer into her favourite chair. Then, erect once more, she hastily replenished Pet-Lamb's empty cup. Pet-Lamb had a determined, self-assertive nature, and it was as well to be in time.

The fire was snapping cosily. Miss Julia put on another stick of fragrant cherry wood, paused to rearrange the roses on the table at her side; then, seating herself once more, she poured herself another cup of tea. Really, it was very good to be at home again. By the time Pet-Lamb had finished her repast and settled herself for a nap, Miss Julia had almost forgotten the waiting trunks, in a blissful, formless reverie compounded of hazy memories of last-night's sleeper and of yet more hazy plans

for the placid weeks which stretched away before her.

A maid broke in upon her bliss, a maid whose immaculate cap and collar furnished a crisp setting for a countenance quite blank in its surprise.

"Miss Julia, ma'am?"

Regretfully Miss Julia pulled herself out of her reverie.

"Yes, Lena."

"Miss Julia — Really, I hate to tell you; but there 's a boy outside —"

The maid had paused to gather up her courage for the last and worst announcement. Before she could make it, Miss Julia's voice had cut athwart her pause, an even, quiet voice which was in strange contrast to the suppressed excitement of the maid.

"What does he want, Lena?"

Lena caught her breath. Then she exploded her bomb.

"You. He says he 's come to stay."

The bomb appeared to have bowled Miss Julia over.

"To stay?" she echoed feebly, as she set down her cup.

"That's what he says," Lena iterated firmly. "He came in a carriage, and there's a trunk on back. He asked for you, and I told him you were resting and could n't be disturbed."

"What did he say then?" Miss Julia queried, still quite feebly, for she felt as one, dabbling in the edge of the waves, feels when overtaken by a huge and unexpected breaker. She had a vague perception that, mentally at least, she was standing on her head in the sand. "Tell him he must go away," she added, with sudden energy.

Lena clasped her hands upon her pinafore.

"Indeed I did, Miss Julia. I told him you had just come home, and that you were too tired to see anybody at all."

"And did n't he go?"

Lena shook her head slowly, once from right to left, once from left to right. That was all; but the extreme deliberation of the gesture seemed to be adding untold force to its negation.

"He's sitting on the front steps now," she said.

"What sort of a boy?" Miss Julia inquired timorously, as a new fear struck her, a fear born of the late reports from the court for juvenile offenders.

"Awful red-headed," Lena answered tersely.

"And you told him to go?"

"I told him you could not see anybody at all."

"And what did he say then?"

"He said no matter. He'd come to live here, and there was plenty of time ahead of him so he guessed his welcome might as well simmer down a little, or else its warmth might burn him up." It was obvious that Lena was quoting literally.

Miss Julia rose, took a hasty turn up and down the room, faced Lena again.

"What can I do?" she asked helplessly. "To live here! Lena, does he look — demented?"

Lena shook her head.

"No; not very. If he was crazy, he would n't be so sure of what he wanted. He was going to have the driver put his trunk on the verandah; but I told the man that, if he laid a finger on the trunk to take it down, I'd send in a fire alarm and have the hose on him," she explained valiantly.

"Sometimes they are," Miss Julia said, a little bit irrelevantly, or so it seemed to Lena.

The maid unclasped her hands and, crossing the room, drew back the curtain. Then she beckoned to her mistress.

"You can see him here, if you don't make too much noise about it," she whispered.

On the points of her velvet slippers, Miss Julia crossed the room and peered out from beneath the shelter of Lena's lifted arm. Just outside the window, a public hack stood waiting, its horses hanging their heads in drowsy unconcern at the delay, its driver lounging sidewise on his seat, watching his erstwhile passenger. The erstwhile passenger, meanwhile, totally regardless of his new clothes donned for the journey, was amusing himself by alternately "shinning" up the slim verandah pillars and sliding down again. At least every other time that he slid down, moreover, he lost his balance on the edge of the verandah and capsized over into the bed of crocuses beneath. From the carriage window, two fond gray eyes, set in a vast and tousled head, watched him adoringly.

For the space of full five minutes, Miss Julia watched him, too. Seemingly, she was hypnotized at the sight: the combination of the waiting horses, the energetic boy and the crumpled bed of crocuses. Then her eyes fell upon the head framed in the carriage window. The other details, albeit unwelcome, were yet within her ken. This object transcended the limits of her past experience.

"What's that?" she demanded sharply.

Lena craned her neck.

"Saints be good to us!" she ejaculated then,

with a swift lapse into her native idiom. "I did n't be seeing it before."

Miss Julia peered again. She was very short-sighted; besides, it was now many months since she had beheld her nephew, so it was no especial wonder that she did not recognize him in this unexpected vision at her portal.

"Tell him he must go away at once, Lena," she said, with sudden dignity.

"So I did, ma'am; and that's all the good there was in it."

Miss Julia hesitated. Then she made a second rallying.

"Then I shall tell him so, myself," she announced, with a fresh wave of dignity which ebbed, however, in her final phrases, "But I think perhaps you'd best go to the door with me, Lena."

To the door, accordingly, they went: haughty, timorous little mistress and frilly, haughty maid. At the door, the mistress took the lead, so absorbed in the final, impending ruin of her crocus bed as to be totally unconscious that Pet-Lamb, ever devoted and ever curious, was sauntering along behind her.

"You must go away at once, boy," Miss Julia ordered valiantly at the heels that clasped the post above her head.

With a dizzying swiftness, the heels were replaced by a round, snub-nosed boyish face, as their owner slid down past Miss Julia's level, balked at the floor, toppled over and landed in a sitting posture in the exact middle of the last remaining patch of blossoms. Thence he sent up to her astounded ears his word of greeting.

"Hullo, Aunt Julia!" he observed nonchalantly.

Then, for the first time, Miss Julia recognized her guest.

"Ernest Angell!" she exclaimed.

Without troubling himself to arise, Buddie offered protest.

"Oh, come off there, Aunt Julia! You were n't my spankers in baptism, and Daddy has promised that nobody else shall be allowed to call me that, till I say the word."

"Where is your father?" Miss Julia asked, catching at the first safe conversational straw that offered. Indeed, it was a little disconcerting to find one's nephew seated in one's crocus bed, especially when the aforesaid nephew was very little better — or worse — than a total stranger to her.

"In town — now."

The break in the reply escaped Miss Julia's ear. She was trying too hard to summon back her hospitable instincts, to heed what Buddie said, still less what he implied. She tried to speak alertly.

"And you have come to make me a little visit? How —"

Fortunately for her moral record, Miss Julia was spared the necessity for perjuring herself. Pet-Lamb, though fat and lazy, by now had appeared upon the threshold, where she stood rubbing her fluffy flanks against Miss Julia's skirts. On the instant of her appearing, there was a sudden stir within the carriage, a stir which brought Buddie to his feet without delay.

"Hi! Ebenezer! Charge!" he said, in an accent which must have shaken the Metropolitan tower, a good hundred miles to the westward.

And Ebenezer did charge, albeit not exactly in the sense which Buddie had intended. The carriage door flew open and Ebenezer flew out and then flew up the steps. There was a yip and there was a yowl; and then two furry, fluffy streaks, the one pure white, the other dark, dark grizzle, moved swiftly down the hall and vanished through the open doorway of the library. A moment later, the crash of cups and the clash of spoons announced to the waiting ears outside that Ebenezer, like Pet-Lamb, was taking tea.

As she left the dinner table, that same night, Miss Julia bade Lena to telephone for her masseuse to come at bed-time. To that functionary, Miss Julia made frank confession that she was feeling curiously jaded. Buddie, meanwhile, in the second-best guest room, was conscious of no feelings at all save one: a great and overwhelming homesickness. He yearned for his own room at home, with its strange and unseemly medley of boyish "fixings"; he yearned for Ebenezer, shut up in the cellar with nothing but a rug to sleep on; most of all, he yearned for Daddy, absent in New York and doubtless packing for that coming journey. This final yearning grew on Buddie; it would not be downed. Rather, it seemed to rise up all about him, to shut him in and fairly stop his breath. At last, he could endure the loneliness no longer. Rising, he stealthily opened the door of his room, and stood there waiting to assure himself that the household was fast asleep. Then, softly and on his toe-tips, he went down the stairs, through the deserted house and down the cellar stairs in search of Ebenezer. And Ebenezer, restless without his master, had also been in search of something:

a rat in the coal cellar close at hand. Buddie took no heed of that, however. Instead, gathering the great dog in his arms, he lugged him up the cellar stairs, through the deserted house and up the stairs to his own room where, panting heavily, he deposited him in the immaculate white bed. An hour later, Buddie, the tears still wet upon his cheeks, had fallen fast asleep, his red head nestled into Ebenezer's shaggy, crocky side.

Earlier, however, had come the needful explanations.

Miss Julia might be haughty, she might even feel certain reservations concerning the charms of boyhood. Nevertheless, she was kindly of heart and generous withal. On that account, ignoring the disordered library, where Ebenezer was gobbling up the sugar and the broken biscuits, and where Lena, on a chair, was vainly endeavouring to induce Pet-Lamb to descend from the top of the tall bookcase: ignoring all this, Miss Julia had led the way to a room quite on the other side of the house.

"Come in here, Ernest," she bade him as cordially as she was able. "Sit down, while I tell the maid where the man shall put your trunk. So you are coming to make me a little visit?"

Her tone was faultless in its courtesy; but Buddie's quick ear detected a flaw in its sincerity. His doubts concerning Ebenezer's welcome vanished behind the reascending doubts which concerned his own.

"Did n't you get Daddy's letter?" he demanded directly, for it was never Buddie's habit to delay his knowledge of the worst.

Smiling, Miss Julia shook her head.

"Not that it matters," she added lightly. "Of course, I am always glad to have a visit from you."

Buddie shut his teeth. Then he blurted out the unlovely truth.

"It is n't a visit, Aunt Julia. I'm to stay."

"Of course, as long as I can keep you. How long is your vacation?"

"But it is n't a vacation," Buddie insisted desperately. "Can't you catch on to it, Aunt Julia? I've — Oh, where can Daddy's letter have gone to? He said he'd told you all about it, and all the reason, and you'd understand, even if you did n't answer." The freckled face was scarlet now, and the brown eyes looked desperate, appealing.

"I have n't opened my letters yet," Miss Julia told him.

"Yet?" Buddie echoed blankly.

"Since I came home. I only came up from Saint Augustine, to-day," she explained.

"And you have n't had Daddy's letter yet?" There was a world of boyish consternation in the slow inquiry.

"It is probably there in the hall with all the others," Miss Julia told him.

"Then," and there came an unaccustomed quaver into Buddie's voice; "then I may as well tell you now, myself. Daddy has got to go away. He is n't sure for just how long; but he could n't take me with him. And, Aunt Julia, he's sent me here to live with you, to be your boy, till he comes back again. Truly, Aunt Julia, I hope you won't be mad about my coming. I could n't help myself, and Daddy said, once you had his letter, he was sure it would be all right."

Miss Julia rallied swiftly and raised her head to speak. Before she could utter a single syllable, however, there came the soft padding of feet behind her and she turned to look. A great gray dog, tousled and shaggy, his creamy whiskers plentifully powdered with crumbs of biscuit, had halted at her side and was regarding her with friendly hazel eyes, while he wagged the tangled tuft of hair which answered for a tail.

"That's Ebenezer," Buddie made hasty explanation. "Daddy said he thought you'd let him stay with me. He's the only relation I've got left but you."

And Ebenezer, hearing his name and believing it was his turn to make petition for a welcome, lifted himself upon his hind legs, placed his ragged paws upon Miss Julia's silken shoulders and kissed her face with creamy, crumby whiskers.

As Daddy had foretold, it was all right, once Miss Julia had read the letter.

Lena brought it in from the hall, and Miss Julia tore it open, read the first dozen lines and pretended to read the rest of it. Her eyes, though, were too dim to make out a single word, after the first brief announcement. She turned the pages one by one, however, till she reached the last. Then, folding the sheets, she devoted herself to the making Buddie feel at home, until the time came for them both to dress for dinner. Miss Julia carried the letter with her, when she went away to dress; and her eyelids were pink, her eyes unusually bright, when, later on, she took her place at the table. Buddie, meanwhile, with Ebenezer at his heels, had been making a thorough investigation of the resources

of his room. It was a pretty room, with windows on three sides, for it was in one of the wings of the rambling old house. One window opened into an apple tree whose branches swept the casement; another offered access to a flat tin roof which seemed to stretch away indefinitely around the corner towards the back of the house. So far, so good. The place possessed its strategic advantages for later operations. Nevertheless, there was the flimsy, spindling furniture to be considered, that and the curtains, two sets of them, one white and very tearable, one stouter and of flowered chintz.

"Apple blossoms, too!" sniffed Buddie. "Girl-truck!"

Ebenezer, meanwhile, had settled himself for a nap in the one upholstered chair the room afforded. He was not critical, as was his master. Granted the softness of the cushions, Ebenezer did not care one jot or tittle whether the covering was strewn with pinkish apple blossoms, or with black and scampering rats.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

NEXT morning, a full hour before the rising bell, Buddie awoke, arose, dressed himself and went clattering down the stairs to view the garden underneath his window. Ebenezer, wailing lustily, balked at the stairs, and Buddie was forced to remount and carry him down them in his arms. Miss Julia groaned in spirit, as she drew the blankets close about her ears to shut out the unaccustomed racket. Always, in that well-ordered house, it had been a law as of the Medes and Persians that any one who violated the sanctity of Miss Julia's morning nap instantly should be dismissed. In the case of a servant, Miss Julia never hesitated; but Buddie brought her to a halt. She knew, within the depths of her New England conscience, that Buddie could not be dismissed.

Miss Julia's formal garden was one of the show places of the community. Laid out by her great-grandfather, carefully tended and weeded and watered by her grandmother's loving hands, it still kept to the prim old lines of its establishment. Walled in with box and privet, its narrow paths were weedless, its narrow beds ablaze with all the old-time favourites according to their season. In one of the back corners, a smoke-tree mingled its branches with an overgrown snowball bush; in

the other, a lilac thicket was rioting out across the nearer flower beds, and working its way backward over the fence and into the dooryard of the house beyond.

Just now, the more distant of the lilac boughs were threshing wildly through the air, as though a particularly local sort of cyclone was bent upon their immediate and complete destruction. Ebenezer pricked up his ears and snuffed the morning breeze inquiringly, albeit from a safe distance. Buddie, more bold, drew nearer to inspect the phenomenon, quite unaware that, while he did so, the source of the phenomenon was inspecting him.

The knowledge came to him by slow degrees. At first, he judged himself invisible; for the voice that sang or, rather, shouted, forth from the threshing lilacs, sounded altogether too detached to come from the throat of a critical spectator, even though the spectator was obviously a girl, and therefore wily. The words were noncommittal.

"Lá la lá la lá la-a,
Lá la lá la lá la-a,
Lá la lá la lá la-a,
Lá la la lá-a."

she sang, and the voice would not have been unmusical, if only one could have divided it by nine and then shared the result among a whole quartette. However, the rhythm made up for any other lacks, and the lilac boughs threshed in unison with the theme.

Then, without warning and with no perceptible pause, the theme changed, grew dreary, rhythmless, although the volume of sound remained quite

undiminished. This time, moreover, there were words.

"The rocks can rend, the earth can quake,
The seas can roar, the mountains shake,
Of feeling, all things show some sign
But this unfeeling heart of mine."

This was too much for Buddie. He addressed Ebenezer a shade too audibly for perfect manners.

"Jiminy, Ebenezer! She's got it bad, for sure."

The response came unexpectedly, punctuated by a soft thud, as of two sturdy heels lighting on the turf. There was one final convulsion of the lilac boughs and then they came to a sudden rest. Buddie, in the succeeding silence, wondered what had hit him. The fact was, the words had hit him, leaving him breathless by their sheer pugnacity, —

"I have not got it bad, either; and it is n't good manners to pass remarks on other people."

"You need n't have been listening, then," Buddie suggested curtly.

"It's my garden."

Buddie grew even more terse than before.

"Doubt it."

"It is, too."

"You mean, I suppose, that it belongs to your father," Buddie explained elaborately, becoming suddenly suave again.

The pause assured him that his explanation had struck home, leaving his adversary speechless for the moment. It was only for the moment, however. A moment afterward, she was neither unseen nor speechless. Furthermore, as had hap-

pened before, her suddenness left Buddie almost speechless in his turn.

"What a homely old dog that is! Is it yours?" she queried abruptly, as she poked her head over the fence from a direction wholly unexpected to Buddie, and pointed a slim, disdainful finger at the almost priceless Ebenezer.

This was carrying war into the enemy's camp, with a vengeance. Buddie rose to the defence, albeit he would have liked to wait a little and study the face before him, a merry, mocking face, with dimples beside the thin, scarlet lips, and two immense yellow pigtails dangling over the straight young shoulders. Buddie liked her looks a great deal better than he liked her conversation.

"He is n't an old dog, and he's a stunner," he retorted. "Everybody says so, that knows anything about dogs."

There was a pause. Then the dimples deepened.

"He might be, if his hair was combed," she made meditative answer. "Just at present, he looks like a feather bed that's lost its tick. What's your name, boy?"

Buddie's cheeks flamed. He was not used to this peremptory style of address, he who had been the idol of his home and the cock of his school. Once more he felt himself driven to abrupt retort.

"What's yours, girl?"

She sniffed.

"Anyhow, you're a Yankee," she assured him.

"I am not," Buddie contradicted rashly.

Once again she had the best of him.

"Really? That's too bad. I suppose you came in by Castle Garden, not by Plymouth Rock, the

way I did. Still, one can't help one's family, I suppose. Are you visiting Miss Julia?"

"What do you think about it?" Buddie asked, a little bit pugnaciously.

"I — " again the dimples; "did n't know. You see, there are n't any trespass signs, this side of the garden. And — "

"I'm her nephew," Buddie told her, with a frantic snatch in the direction of his boyish dignity.

"Oh. And I'm her next door neighbour." The girl bowed mockingly. "How do you do, boy?"

"Very well, I thank you, girl."

"Are you going to stay here long, boy?"

Buddie bit his lip.

"That depends, girl," he said, loftily.

Her curiosity became too much for her.

"On what?" she asked him.

Then Buddie scored.

"On my plans," he told her, still more loftily.

This time, the silence was of her making. When at last she spoke, it was to open up a new lane for conversation.

"Can you climb a fence?"

"Rather!"

"Then come over and see my playhouse, boy."

"My name is Buddie," he informed her rashly, rashly for it gave her the chance to reassume her mantle of superiority.

"What a queer name!" she said, with frank disapproval. "It sounds like a nickname."

"So it is." Buddie once more grew curt.

"For what?"

"Ernest." Lying was outside of Buddie's code

of honour; therefore he shut his teeth and confessed to his unlovely heritage of baptism.

"Ernest," she repeated. "That is n't so very bad. What else?"

Buddie faltered. Then he yielded to the inevitable.

"Angell," he told her briefly.

He saw it coming in advance, yet he had no suspicion of the violence of the mirth which was about to overwhelm her. For one instant, she struggled against it. Then she gave in, and laughed till her cheeks were scarlet, till the tears hung on the ends of her long brown lashes.

"Ernest Angell!" she gasped, when she could speak again. "Er-nest Angell! Well, I must say you neither look the part nor act it. The angels I know about are slender, with floating raven hair, and the most perfect manners I ever saw. But — Ernest Angell!"

"I tell you they call me Buddie," poor Buddie protested wrathfully.

Instantly she sobered and stuck out her hand in token of her penitence.

"Honestly, I did n't mean to make you mad," she told him, in a hearty, downright fashion which went far to make Buddie forgetful of her previous sparring. "Of course, such a name must be rather awful to carry around. I know, because my middle name is Rosalie, just for all the world like a Paris doll. I'd pull the hair of any girl who called me by it."

Buddie's fist shut over hers. Only her pluck kept her from crying out at the pressure.

"Ditto!" he said. "I did lick one fellow, too,

licked him till he lisped for more than a week. In a case like that, it's the mouth you want to thrash; the hair has n't anything to do with it."

She bowed before his logic. Then she asked him, —

"Did he stop it, after?"

Buddie smiled sedately at the recollection.

"Bet you! But so did I. Daddy never would stand for fighting, and that was my last chance."

"What did he do to you?" the girl asked, with sudden curiosity. "Did he whip you?"

Buddie's tone became disdainful.

"Daddy never whips," he answered. "He just says things, and then you know just exactly what an ass he thinks you've been."

Something in Buddie's voice warned the girl that she was treading upon dangerous ground. Once more she changed the subject.

"I am Teresa Hamilton," she volunteered. "I live here, next door, so we may as well get acquainted, first as last, for my mother knows Miss Julia perfectly well."

"Teresa. And I suppose they call you Tessa," Buddie observed a little tritely.

Her answer came upon the instant, albeit with an accent which removed it far from the domains of slang.

"Not if I know it!" she said. "It's got to be Teresa, or else keep still. I don't like nicknames. Still," the laugh came back into her eyes; "I admit that, in your case, there's some excuse. However, I sha'n't call you Buddie."

"Why not?"

"I think it's very silly. It does n't mean anything at all."

Buddie once more grew rash.

"It does. It means brother."

"Brother to what? How many are there of you?" she demanded.

Buddie's reply was terse.

"Just me."

"I knew it." The yellow pigtails bobbed with the vigour of her nod. "Nobody but an only child would be so —"

"So what?"

But she was not to be caught.

"Come along and see my playhouse," she commanded.

Buddie demurred.

"It's almost time for breakfast," he objected.

"No; it is n't. Miss Julia is always late; breakfast won't be ready for hours and hours and hours, and it won't be much but bacon, then. You 'd better come. Besides, your dog is digging up Miss Julia's flowers."

Buddie turned his head in hot haste. It had been agreed, the night before, that Ebenezer's status in the family circle depended upon Ebenezer's good behaviour, and now Ebenezer was pursuing a totally imaginary mole through the sub-soil of Miss Julia's bed of white narcissus. Half an hour before, the noses of the fat green buds had been poking up through the soil, forerunners of the earliest of the garden blossoms. Now, thanks to Ebenezer's industry, the bulbs themselves were poking up, and the fat green buds were yawning in flat impotence among them. It was ominously plain to Ebenezer's master that, for this one season, the narcissus bed must yield its customary precedence in the flowery

procession of Miss Julia's garden. And, moreover, the garden was so formal, Ebenezer's gardening, so very, very lacking in formality.

Any digression, therefore, would have been a welcome one to Buddie, who would have scorned to show the consternation that he really felt. Accordingly, seizing the miry Ebenezer by the collar, he bundled him through a convenient gap in the fence and was preparing to follow, when Teresa's voice brought him to a sudden halt.

"I had n't invited the dog," she remarked at nothing in particular.

This time Buddie dominated the situation, as became a man.

"No; but I had. Either he goes, or I stay. I'm not going to leave him to be walloped, when I'm not here."

"We-el," she yielded.

Buddie chirruped, and Ebenezer gave an ecstatic bounce of comprehension, before he fell back into a sedate *jog, jog*, close at the heels of his young master.

No boy brought up inside the limits of a city, no boy accustomed to brick walls and asphalt streets, could have failed to rejoice in the sight that met the eyes of Buddie, once he was over the fence that divided Miss Julia's formal garden from the great side yard beyond. True, the side yard belonged to a rather small red house which obviously had seen its better days a good while before this present hour. But the windows of the house were wide open to the morning sun; the sprawling verandahs were already strung with brilliant-hued hammocks, and a mysterious network of cords extending from

the upper windows suggested everything from flags to telegraphs. A hive of bees stood near the back door; a procession of fuzzy ducklings sauntered down the path towards a distant fissure in the turf, which could mean nothing in the world but a brook; and a pen of rabbits occupied a distant corner behind a rambling concoction of barn and woodshed and grape arbour, all curiously intermingled. Ebenezer's eyes were on the line of ducklings; but Buddie's had roved on towards the grassy reaches far beyond the barn, reaches where the turf grew thick and lush beneath the spreading branches of the apple trees, where the brook chuckled and purred its pleasure in the April day, where, dimly seen at the very farther end and half-hidden by the sheltering tree-trunks, a little house, fit for a doll or for a fairy princess, a house with real glass windows and a door and a usable brick chimney, awaited his coming and his subsequent approval.

Teresa's eyes followed the direction of his glance.

"That's it," she told him briefly.

Buddie's approval found vent in a single word.

"Bully!" he said. And then he added, "And it's yours?"

She nodded.

"My very own. My father had it built for me, when I was quite a little girl." Her tone suggested that she now was senile. "You see, I'm the only girl, with lots and lots of brothers, and sometimes I seem to get rather crowded out, they tease so and make such hay of all my things. My father said it was n't fair. If the house could n't hold me, I should have one that could. So he had this one

built, and he gave me the key, and the boys can't come here, except when I invite them. Generally they are pretty good about it, only they do climb on the roof and sing songs and throw things down the chimney, when they know I am going to do some thinking," she added meditatively.

The fun flashed into Buddie's eyes.

"Do you do it often?" he inquired.

As if in answer, her dimples showed themselves.

"Not as often as I should, if there were n't nine of them," she admitted.

"Nine! Jiminy!" Buddie ejaculated.

"Yes, nine." She appeared to think it was her arithmetic that he called into question. "There's Eric, and Sandy, and Paul," she counted on her fingers; "and Billy, and Jack, and Horace, and Bertie, and Duncan, and little Tootles."

"Little Tootles?" Buddie began to think that there might be some other people afflicted in the matter of their names.

"Yes, for the present. You see, we've only had him a few months, and we have n't been able to think up any good name for him," Teresa explained. "The other boys seem to have used up all the best ones, and there's not much left for poor little Tootles."

"No; I should imagine not," Buddie assented. Then, from the standpoint of his only-child-hood, he added, rather to himself, "Imagine having nine brothers, anyhow!"

"It is n't so bad," Teresa said defensively. "That is, not when they behave themselves. The worst of it is, that happens so very seldom. It takes an awful lot of good behaviour to go around so many

boys, even when they mean to be—" she hesitated; then her dimples came again; "earnest angels."

"Stow that!" Buddie ordered, with uncouth abruptness.

For an instant, she eyed him cornerwise. Then, aware that he meant what he said, she dropped her teasing.

"Eric is the oldest," she added nonchalantly. "He's almost fourteen."

"How old are you?" Buddie demanded flatly.

"Fifteen years and two months and ten days," came the glib answer. "I always keep track of it, because I meant to have been born on Washington's Birthday and be named Georgianna, and I never really got over the disappointment. But come along and see my house."

Ebenezer came along, too, and lined up on the threshold to peer in. Buddie's judgment of the house was delayed a little by the discovery that Ebenezer was carrying one of the ducklings in his mouth, a duckling which had lost its fluffiness by reason of much sucking. Ordinarily, Buddie was the soul of downrightness. Nevertheless, he judged it better to remove the duckling when Teresa's eyes were not upon the dog. No need to hasten the hour of the inevitable recriminations. Therefore, while Teresa was unlocking the front door, Buddie pried open Ebenezer's jaws, craftily abstracted the now soggy duckling and, lacking other tomb for it, popped it into the side pocket of his coat. That done, he followed Teresa across the threshold of the house.

Viewed close at hand, the house appeared to Buddie to be a veritable gem. Shingled in dark, dark green from foundation stone to ridgepole, scarce

nine feet above the ground, it not only had a usable chimney, but an angular bay window as well. Within, there were two rooms, a living-room furnished in chintz and wicker, and a kitchen equipped with a small range and an infinity of pots and pans. Beside the kitchen hearthstone sat a venerable doll, her face mottled with age, her kid arms dangling at her side in an attitude of limpest resignation.

"That's Rosa," Teresa introduced him.

There came a disparaging cadence into Buddie's voice.

"Do you play dolls?"

"No; I don't," Teresa told him flatly. "I've put away all the others; but I can't get on without old Rosa yet. I tell her things, and whip her when people get too cranky."

Buddie's hand closed on Ebenezer's topmost tag-lock, and he nodded.

"Same here; only I never hit him. I could n't do that; but I suppose dolls don't care. How they do understand things, though!"

And, in the momentary silence that came after, was born a friendship which was destined to outlast many and many a passing year.

Teresa broke the silence, her voice a little shaky.

"The stove is n't for looks, by any means," she observed. "One of the conditions of my having the house was that, every single Saturday that I'm at home, I am to ask at least four of the family to a meal I've cooked all by myself. I can choose the four, and choose the meal."

"I should think you'd always make it breakfast," Buddie advised her. "It 's easy to get, and soonest over."

She eyed him disdainfully from the height of her experience.

"That's all you know about having brothers," she said scornfully. "No boy ever was on time at any breakfast, and I can't have the work dragging along, all day."

Buddie's smile was cajoling.

"You have n't tried me yet," he said suggestively.

Nevertheless, Miss Julia's breakfast was getting rather cold, when Buddie finally bethought himself that he was hungry. However, Miss Julia reflected that this was only the first morning, and very likely—

"Good morning, Ernest," she said, while, forgetful of her shattered morning nap and of her dried-up cereal, she bent her face forward to him ever so slightly.

But Buddie, used to the prevailing lack of caresses in his father's masculine environment, remained uncompromisingly erect.

"Morning, Aunt Julia," he responded briefly. "Sorry to be late. Who 's the girl, next door?"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BUDDIE'S NEW SCHOOL

IT was on the second Friday of the Easter holidays that Buddie and Ebenezer had made their turbulent appearance beneath Miss Julia's orderly roof. On the Monday after, Buddie had marched away to school. Miss Julia, tender-hearted and very conscientious in her attitude towards her uninvited guest, would fain have coddled him a little longer; but Daddy, wise as always, had laid down the law: school on Monday morning. He was only too well aware that out of idleness is born homesickness, and domestic friction, and all the other ills and mischiefs to which boyish flesh is heir. Therefore, gloomy of brow and reluctant, Buddie set out for school on Monday morning.

Eric was to be his guide and sponsor. Teresa had ordained that, for already she had taken on herself the responsibility of ordaining the details of Buddie's plans.

"Of course, I shall be there, too," she argued; "but it would set you down as a Miss Nancy for evermore, if you appeared at school, tied to my apron string. Eric is steady as the church, and yet the boys all like him, he knows so much about electricity and worms and things. He'll get you started, all right."

And get him started Eric did, wisely and well,

although his wisdom was not precisely of the sort that Buddie would have chosen for his own.

Neither was the school, for that matter. Buddie had stepped straight out of kindergarten into a school which specialized in fitting boys for Lawrenceville and Andover, a school with a waiting list and with two ex-presidents among its trustees. And Buddie, more even from personal prowess than paternal pull, had been the acknowledged cock of the school, just as he had been the lordlet of his kindergarten, whence he had emerged at the end of his first day, proclaiming loudly, —

"I've had a beautiful time, Daddy. I pulled short hair and I pulled long, and they every one of them howled."

But this school was altogether different, so different that Buddie, looking it over with bored and critical eyes, questioned whether he would ever stoop to care to become its magnate. There were girls in this school, fully as many girls as boys, and some of the girls chewed gum. To Buddie, broad-minded in his standards as is any healthy boy, that pastime marked the social limit which he could never bring himself to pass. Humanity, indeed, he divided into two great classes: people who used chewing gum, and nice people who did not. Chewing was a bovine habit, not for humans like himself.

Buddie swept his eyes carelessly across the ranks of girls, pig-tailed and frilled and more or less self-conscious underneath his glance. He exchanged a hearty nod with Teresa, who returned it with interest and widened her mouth in some silent salutation which Buddie was unable to interpret. Then his glance swept onward to take in the boys.

At the request of Miss Julia, Eric had been assigned to Buddie for a seat-mate; but Buddie, even in that one short walk together, had made up his mind that the combination should be as short-lived as he possibly could make it. Eric had conversed learnedly about such interesting things as henhawks and wireless telegraphy; he even had confessed to a half-built airship in the barn. Still, his sandy hair showed the comb-marks, and, worse, it curled forward from behind the ears. Moreover, before he entered the schoolroom, he halted, standing first on one leg, then the other, while he dusted off his shoes upon the calves of his black stockings. No; taken all in all, Buddie was conscious of doubts concerning Eric.

Sandy, the next Hamilton in line, was also in the schoolroom. He seemed to Buddie to be all that his name implied, a jolly, snub-nosed little urchin who appeared to be related to the sunbeams that came beating through the southern windows of the schoolroom to rest upon his flaxen head. Restless as a jumping jack, always ready for the giggle that ought by good rights to have been suppressed behind a decorous hand, his yellow hair rampant and tousled and his blue eyes gleaming with mischief, Sandy was far more attractive to the mind and heart of Buddie than was the decorous and intellectual Eric.

Sandy had been away on a vacation visit to his grandmother, who alternately deplored and adored him. On that account, Buddie had not seen him until just after school was called to order, that morning. By reason of the family likeness to Teresa, he had decided that Sandy must be of the clan. The question which he put to Eric, however, had been

stolidly ignored. Instead, Eric had dug into his desk and exhumed a Testament with a pink satin marker; and Buddie had been driven to seek information from Teresa who, even from a distance, kept a wary eye upon her new-found friend. Buddie's school life had made him past master in the art of dumb show; and he found Teresa a close second. Her reply brought to him the information he had sought; but it also brought to her a swift rebuke from the powers upon the platform, and Teresa, unabashed, but quieted, was forced to bury her nose in the allotted morning psalm.

Recess brought confirmation of Sandy's identity.

"Hullo!" he observed, sweeping down on Buddie as soon as the line was broken up, and conversation was in order. "I'm Sandy, brother of that Eric-Thing you're sitting with. How many extras have you got in your knife? My grandmother has given me a beauty new one, with four blades and a lot more other fixings. Want to see?"

As a matter of course, Buddie did want to see, and the two of them strolled off together, while Teresa, from the girls' side of the yard, stared after them with contented eyes. The cause of her contentment transpired later when, recess over, Buddie and Sandy came strolling backward from the corner where they had been industriously getting acquainted. That the process had been one of mutual satisfaction, their combined manner left no room for doubt.

"You see," Sandy told him, as they prepared to fall into line once more; "I did n't get home till the others had started off for school. Teresa sent a note across to me, though, while She," She was the teacher, not Teresa; "was finding the place for read-

ing round. She told me you'd come to live at Miss Julia's, and had a dog, and were as spunky as she is, even if you did have to sit with Eric. Not that Eric is so bad, you know," he added, with belated loyalty. "It's only, I suppose, because he's got the thing the minister calls a poet's soul."

Buddie, who had times of being exceedingly literal-minded, turned to gaze on Eric with awed eyes.

"Does Eric write poems?" he inquired.

Sandy chuckled.

"Not on your life! He only moons and maunders now and then. Now and then, though, he is as healthy a kid as you can find."

And then the leaders of the line went tramping up the stairs, and Buddie and Sandy, perforce, were parted and fell in behind them.

That morning was a season of triumph for Buddie. He had been well trained, well taught, and he was undeniably bright. Moreover, he was totally lacking in all forms of self-consciousness. That had been Daddy's doing, Daddy who had accustomed him to do the thing most obviously right at the moment, and then, if it proved to have been wrong after all, to shut his teeth and take the consequences and then forget them utterly, save in so far as they concerned his choice of right, the next time. Accordingly, it never once occurred to Buddie that, as the new boy in the school, he was the centre of every one's attention. Instead, with neither fussiness nor pertness, he did what he was told with perfect unconcern, and showed himself just as he was, a bright young sinner who had within himself the making of a saint. And the teacher liked him

from the start; and, what was a good deal more to the purpose, so did all the other pupils.

It was a contented Buddie, then, who went strolling home at noon with Sandy on the one side, Teresa on the other. To be sure, his contentment had been a little marred by the discovery that this school "kept" in the afternoons. However, the almost simultaneous discovery of banana fritters for luncheon, lots and lots of fritters, as many as he could eat: this discovery had gone far towards the annulling of the other. Besides, from all accounts, Ebenezer had been angelically discreet, all morning. Besides again, he wished to see more, much more, of Sandy, who had invited him over to compare stamp books, that very night. And Teresa, coming home, had hinted that Buddie might possibly be included in her next Saturday dinner party. Notwithstanding the attention demanded by the fritters, Buddie's tongue made record speed, throughout the luncheon; and it was in a mood of serene, well-filled contentment that Buddie ran whistling down the steps on his way back to school.

But, unhappily, that afternoon brought the undoing of Buddie's full contentment, brought, too, a temporary coldness into his relations with Teresa and wrecked his chances of a dinner invitation for many Saturdays to come. To understand the situation to the full, it should be mentioned that Buddie and Teresa and a dozen others made up the top division of the upper class, and that the afternoon ended with spelling dictation to this division who were stationed at the blackboards. Moreover, it was not altogether by chance that Buddie found himself at the board with Teresa.

It had been upon a Friday that Buddie had come to Miss Julia's house; it had been upon the Saturday morning that Buddie had made the acquaintance of Teresa, and, as a natural consequence, his Sunday clothes had intervened since then. Furthermore, Buddie's memory was most inconveniently short. Hence his undoing.

In the dictation exercise, Teresa wrote rapidly and tidily; but Buddie excelled her in speed, if not in tidiness. At last, however, even he shook his red head over a fearsome scrawl and looked about for the eraser. But there was only one eraser for the board, and Teresa was using it, just then. Buddie's chivalry overcame his neatness. He dived into his side pocket for the handkerchief which he recollected only in seasons of great stress, dived, seized a corner and jerked it out with a flourish. Something else came out, too, a dark and sodden something that hurtled through the air and struck Teresa full on the back of her unoccupied and dangling hand. Teresa glanced down. Then she became the colour of a well-cooked beet.

"Oh —h — h!" she said, a thought too loudly for the rulings of the schoolroom. Then, turning upon Buddie, she smote his ribs with the eraser; not in play, however, but in lusty earnest.

"Teresa!" Ominously calm sounded the voice from the platform.

As if determined to get in all the iniquity possible before the inevitable day of reckoning, Teresa smote Buddie once again.

"It's my duck," she said hotly; "my dear little dead duck. I missed him, and I never knew where he was gone."

It was small wonder that Teacher looked a trifle mystified.

"Your — duck, Teresa? But where did it come from?"

Teresa sniffed too audibly and too ostentatiously for perfect manners. Then, —

"That horrid boy had it in his pocket," she made testy answer.

"What boy?"

"Ernest Angell." Impossible to set down in ink the accent which Teresa contrived to throw upon the name! The school suppressed its mirth as best it could, while Buddie, beet-red in his turn, made wrathful whisper, —

"Shut up!"

Again the ominously calm voice sounded from the platform.

"Ernest!"

Buddie subsided into angry silence, pondering, the while, upon the injustice which ordained that a fellow must stand impertinence from Teacher and not talk back. If she had only been a man! His fists doubled, within his sheltering pockets. But —

"Ask him where he got my duck!" Teresa was demanding shrilly.

Much against her will, Teacher put the question. Long experience had taught her the inadvisability of holding court of inquiry before the assembled school.

"I did n't get him," Buddie responded curtly and with a strong accent on the pronoun. "I did n't want her fuzzy old duck for anything. Ebenezer got him and sucked him till he was n't good for much, and I took him away from Ebenezer when she was n't

looking, and put him in my pocket. Girls do make such an awful row about trifles," Buddie added loftily; "and I did n't want her to be taking it out on Ebenezer."

Teacher yielded to her curiosity.

"Who is Ebenezer?" she queried.

Buddie's wrath vanished before his pride, as vanishes a puff of smoke before the morning breeze.

"Ebenezer? He's my dog. He's a thoroughbred old English sheep dog with a natural bob tail, and his mother took first prize in ——"

"That will do," said Teacher.

Nevertheless, Buddie, looking straight into her eyes, saw a twinkle there and felt that he had scored. He communicated this belief to Teresa, a little later on, by means of the artificial widening of his mouth and eyelids with the assistance of his thumbs and little fingers. His life in the boys' school had left Buddie strangely ignorant of the arts of juvenile flirtation.

Arm in arm with another girl and ostentatiously aloof from Buddie and his mates, Teresa chattered and laughed incessantly, on her way home from school, that night. On that account, Buddie judged it the part of dignity to cancel his engagement with Sandy, for the evening. Instead, he spent the evening lying on the rug before the fire, with Ebenezer's shaggy head pillowed upon his chest. Buddie, pondering the events of the day, pulled Ebenezer's ears in token of affection. That was the best thing about Ebenezer; he was always loyal, always the comprehending chum. He was better than all the soggy ducks and all the yellow-pigtailed girls in all creation. He never got a fellow into scrapes, nor

batted him about the ribs with an eraser. Neither did his hair show lanky tooth-marks, nor curl flatly forward from behind the ears. Rather not! And, some day, he would go to school and be shown off to Teacher. She looked as if she would know enough to recognize a good dog, when she saw one. Anyhow —

"Well, Ernest?" Quite silently Miss Julia had entered the room from the parlour where she had been entertaining a late guest.

Buddie gritted his teeth. He longed to rebel, yet dared not. He loathed the name; but Aunt Julia had been wonderfully good to him, wonderfully clever in finding out the caprices of his appetite, wonderfully silent concerning the misdeeds of Ebenezer. Buddie longed to rebel; but he decided that he would better temporize. Aunt Julia was his hostess; moreover, she looked too little and far, far too dainty to make the fight a fair one.

"Has it been a good day?" Miss Julia added, as she turned to draw up a chair.

Instantly, and to the manifest surprise of Ebenezer, Buddie was on his feet. Later, he wondered at the swiftness of the action. It might have broken Ebenezer's faithful neck. And yet, Miss Julia ought n't to be hauling heavy chairs about the room. When they were once more settled, Miss Julia in the chair and Buddie on the rug, this time with Ebenezer for the pillow, he answered her question.

"It might have been worse," he told her temperately; and then, without the slightest previous intention, he went on and told her all about the duckling.

Miss Julia understood. That was the strange

thing about Miss Julia, Buddie had already learned. Despite her immaculate and uncomprehending appearance, Miss Julia generally did understand. Perhaps she took out her half-sistership to Daddy along that line. Anyway, the likeness ended there, there and in her curious trick of eliciting unasked-for confidences.

"Poor Teresa, and poor you!" she said now, when Buddie had finished his narration. Then she laughed a little. "Perhaps I ought to say 'Poor Miss Peters,' too. It is n't generally customary to have dead little ducks come flying round the schoolroom."

"He did n't fly," Buddie corrected her. "He just flumped."

"Did you see anything of Sandy?" Miss Julia asked, a little hastily.

"Yes, all I could. He's a corker," Buddie made enthusiastic reply.

"Ernest," Miss Julia bent forward, resting her hands on her knee and looking down with kindly, merry eyes upon the boy who sprawled at her feet; "I am not quite sure; but I rather think that may be slang."

Instantly Buddie retreated into his shell. Now he was in for it, he told himself. Miss Julia had been pretty decent up to now; but now she was going to begin to preach. Well, he would take it as it came.

Instead, though, —

"I can't make many rules for you," she told him lightly. "Still, I am going to ask a favour, and I hope you'll feel that it's a fair one. Use your slang, if you must, when you're out with the boys; but please leave it there. When you're here in

the house with me, I'm going to ask you if you please won't talk in English, not in slang."

Strange to say, Buddie felt no rebuke in her words. His boyish sense of justice showed him the fairness of her request, and, with characteristic frankness, he promptly came out of his shell again and told her so.

"And now about the Hamiltons," Miss Julia said, when Buddie had settled back again once more. "I am sorry about the duck, because I would like to see you friends with them."

"With Eric?" Buddie suggested, with a giggle.

"Ye–es, with Eric. But I really was thinking more about Sandy, and, still more, about Teresa."

"She's a girl," Buddie objected, with an effort at a disdain which, in reality, he was far from feeling.

"What of that?" Miss Julia asked him quickly. "Besides, she has spent all her life with boys, and knows them better than she does girls."

"What makes you want me to know her, though?" Buddie demanded, a little bit suspiciously.

"Because, for all her swarm of brothers, I sometimes fancy that the girl is lonely. Because I have known the Hamiltons always, known what really nice people they are. They live in a little house; they have n't much money, and Mr. Hamilton works with his hands, not his head. But, after all, those things don't count for much beside the rest of it. Teresa is a splendid girl. In fact," Miss Julia leaned back in her chair and spoke thoughtfully; "I've often felt, if I were going to have a child of my own, I'd like it if she were another Teresa Hamilton."

Had Buddie been a little older and a little bit

more cynical, he might have said things about placid doves and brilliant, saucy, chattering blue jays. Instead, he lay and contemplated Miss Julia with thoughtful and approving eyes.

"Would an old maid like you care about children?" he inquired at length.

Miss Julia flushed at the phrasing of the question. Buddie had not meant to be impertinent; nevertheless, Miss Julia found it in her heart to wish he had not popped her into so unlovely a pigeon-hole, nor labelled her so uncompromisingly. To be sure, she was thirty-one; and, in a strong light, a few little thread-like wrinkles spread from the outer corners of her eyes. Still, no one had ever called her — Miss Julia sighed a little. Then, —

"Yes, Ernest, under some conditions," she said gently.

Buddie pondered. As the upshot of his ponderings, he lifted up his voice.

"Then," he suggested, with a casualness which was by no means genuine; "then why don't you count me in, while I stay here, Aunt Julia?"

However, only an instant later, Buddie was overwhelmed with a swift wave of self-rebuke. He had meant what he said, meant it most sincerely. And yet, was it quite loyal in spirit to his attitude to absent Daddy?

Buddie, stretched out between the linen sheets, that night, lay awake and considered many things. For the first time in his experience, life had come to seem to him unduly complex; henceforward, he would be forced to weigh and measure all manner of conflicting loyalties, to weigh and measure them, and to decide between their claims.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PET-LAMB AND EBENEZER

"AUNT JULIA!" Buddie's accent was despairing. "Can you help a fellow, just a minute?"

Miss Julia laid down her morning paper, with a little sigh. Heretofore, it had been ordained that upon no account was she to be interrupted in her daily reading of *The Times*.

"Where are you, Ernest?"

"In the hall. I'm awful sorry to trouble you; but — I can't seem to manage this fellow all alone." During the slight break in his words, Buddie paused to puff heavily.

Miss Julia appeared in the doorway of the library.

"What is it, Ernest?" she inquired, for, to her eye, nothing seemed especially amiss either with Ebenezer, peering jovially down upon her from the stair-top, or with Buddie, kneeling a step or two below him.

"It's Ebenezer. I've got to teach him to come downstairs alone," Buddie said worriedly. "He's been here a week now, and it's time he learned it, if he's ever going to. Besides, it's Saturday, and I can give the morning to it."

Miss Julia looked as if she distrusted her ears.

"Learn what?" she questioned.

"Learn to come downstairs."

"But how does he come, then?" Miss Julia queried

lucidly, for she was only too well aware that Ebenezer was by no means always at the same level. Indeed, if a dog ever deserved to be called peripatetic, that dog was Ebenezer.

"In my arms. I have to carry him," Buddie explained, a little wearily.

"That great moose! Ernest, you should n't! Make him come down alone," Miss Julia protested, for Ebenezer was burly and very, very solid.

"But he won't."

"Then leave him down," Miss Julia advised.

"He won't stay. You see, first day he was here, I poked and pushed him up the stairs, three or four times running. As soon as he learned the trick, he thought it was good fun, and now he scuds upstairs, the minute I take my eye off from him."

"Then let him scud down again," Miss Julia said, a trifle callously.

Two pairs of reproachful eyes looked down upon Miss Julia in grave rebuke: Buddie's, Ebenezer's. It was Buddie, though, who gave tongue to the rebuke.

"Oh, Aunt Julia! When he does n't know how? What if he fell?"

There was an instant's silence, while Miss Julia digested the rebuke. Meanwhile, she stared up at Ebenezer whose fat, tousled carcase appeared to be the one exception which proved the primary law of gravitation, the rule that what goes up must of necessity come down. Ebenezer stared back again, his tongue lolling out, as if in derision at the limits of her comprehension, his long, soft ears falling forward to frame his cheeks with ringlets suggestive of a poetess of the early 'fifties.

"Nonsense, Ernest!" Miss Julia said at length. "Of course, he's only obstinate. He can't help knowing how."

Buddie faced about, and sat down to argue the matter at his ease.

"How should he know? He never saw a stair in his life till he came here, except front steps. He was born in a kennel flat on the ground, and he's always lived in an apartment with a lift. I don't see how he could be expected to know a flight of stairs from a — a — a rainbow," Buddie concluded, in one grand rhetorical outburst.

"Have you tried to coax him with a little milk?" Miss Julia suggested mildly.

Buddie surveyed her with the exasperation born of such belated suggestions.

"Milk! Quarts!" he told her. "And bones, too, and even big pieces of meat. The cook just loves Ebenezer, you know," he added hurriedly. "She gives him all the scraps she used to put into the pig-pail —"

To say that Miss Julia bristled would but faintly express the change that came upon her.

"Pig-pail! Ernest!" she remonstrated, and her voice was thick with exclamation points of horror. "I don't keep a pig, child. What can you be thinking of?"

"Oh, don't you? I supposed everybody did, that lives in the country; at least, I thought they had a pig-pail," Buddie responded placidly, for his urban mind had not been trained to grasp the social disgrace inherent in a pig. "Well, anyhow, it's Ebenezer gets the scraps, these days. Really, Aunt Julia, there's no telling what that dog won't eat."

Miss Julia waived that question in favour of the one more imminent.

"And won't he come down for the bones?"

Buddie shook his head.

"Not on your life! He just looks sad and whimpers, and sticks down one paw or so to see if the next stair is steady; but he always dodges back again and hides somewhere in your room. I've been at it for an hour now, and that's all the good it does."

"Let me try." Miss Julia advanced to the foot of the stairs and chirruped invitingly. "Come, Ebenezer, good old dog!" she urged. "Come to your —" she gulped; then she added bravely; "own Aunt Julia."

Buddie, from the stair-head, looked down on her with mirthful eyes.

"That would bring him, sure, if anything could, Aunt Julia," he said encouragingly. "Try her again."

Miss Julia did try her again, and yet again. At first, she limited her attempts to little coaxing coos and chirrups. Those failing, she snapped her fingers, and then patted the palms of her hands together. That also failed; and then Miss Julia took little runs to the front door and clattered the doorknob.

"Cats, Ebenezer!" she cried out mendaciously.

From their place at the stair-head, Buddie and Ebenezer still watched her, without stirring. The only difference in their watching lay in the fact that Buddie managed to suppress his mirth. Ebenezer's scarlet, lolling tongue and gay gray eyes betokened no suppression.

At the end of her eleventh run and clatter, Miss Julia halted, breathless.

"Stupid creature!" she said shortly, as she pushed in her hairpins and made fast a loosened puff of hair. "What in the world are you going to do with him, Ernest?"

Buddie continued to suppress his mirth. He spoke with the utmost gravity.

"I think I have thought out a way, Aunt Julia. If you can manage his front legs, I'll take the hind ones. Then, if we wobble the right corners at the right time, we'll have him walking down the stairs before you can say 'Jack Robinson.'"

Miss Julia could have confessed to no especial desire to say 'Jack Robinson.' Nevertheless, Buddie's face was appealing, and, moreover, she never had been in the habit of giving up, conquered. To be sure, her previous conquests had been largely of the intellect, had not concerned anything quite so tangible as a vast, untidy dog, and a flight of front stairs. What if some one should come to call? In that case, she might not be the only one to be inspired to say 'Jack Robinson!' Miss Julia hesitated. Then she kilted up her gown and ascended to take her own part in the fray. Afterwards, alone in her room, as she surveyed her front breadth, she admitted to herself how apt had been her mental choice of the word *fray*. Ultimately, the gown found its way to the wife of a home missionary, a devout lady who placed her own interpretation upon the condition of that same front breadth; but the interpretation was more sanctified than accurate.

A half-hour later found the strife still on. Plainly, neither Buddie nor Miss Julia had caught the trick

of wobbling the right corners at the right time; plainly, too, Ebenezer had not caught the trick of coming down the stairs. Buddie would have given up the struggle; but Miss Julia's firmness had kept pace with her weariness. The dog must come down those very stairs upon those very paws.

"Come, Ebenezer!" she commanded, as she held a saucer of milk ten inches below the level of his nose.

But Ebenezer never budged. He merely stood and gazed down upon her rebukingly, his shaggy head cocked on one side and his eyes pleading, as plainly as any spoken words, to this obdurate Saint Christopher who refused to carry him across.

"Come, Ebenezer!" Miss Julia ordered him again, and she advanced the saucer within a sniffing radius of Ebenezer's nose.

"Buddie! Where are you? I want you," came a call from outside.

It was Teresa's voice, and urgent, for by now the duckling episode was full five days old, and buried, and forgotten.

"Here!" The stairs jarred with the volume of Buddie's reply, and a thin trickle of milk went meandering down Miss Julia's right-side breadth.

"Where?"

"On the front stairs. Come on in."

There was the shortest possible delay. Then Teresa appeared in the hall below, with Pet-Lamb riding high upon her shoulder. As it chanced, Ebenezer had caught no glimpse of Pet-Lamb since the hour of his arrival. Strictly speaking, though, this was no mere happening. Miss Julia had been quick to realize the unwisdom of repeating the episode

which had marked and marred, not only that hour, but also her Minton tea things. Accordingly, she had instructed the entire household to guard against such repetition. Unfortunately for all concerned, Teresa had not been of that household.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Julia," Teresa said penitently, when quiet was restored, and Lena was mopping up the stairs. "I never supposed that Ebenezer had it in him to— "

But Miss Julia did not wait for the finish of her phrase. Instead, her reply fell like a blanket, covering all its possibilities.

"He has," she said. And then she added grimly, "At least, Teresa, you can take to yourself the credit of having taught the creature to come downstairs." And then, for obvious reasons, she went away to put on another skirt.

It would be idle to deny that Miss Julia had had her hours of mourning for the shattering of her former quiet, well-ordered life. Her sense of duty and her sense of humour alike spoke out on behalf of Buddie; but there were periods when Miss Julia felt rising within her an unvoiced regret that either sense was quite so vociferous. Buddie was doubtless all that a boy should be. He was healthy, well-meaning and moderately clean. Nevertheless, it never had occurred to Miss Julia, before his advent, to pine for even the temporary possession of a boy. Her maiden musings, born of a long-dead, always cherished epoch of her life, had gone so far as to lead her to contemplate the charms of having had a daughter. But a son? Never!

And now, to all intents and purposes, a son had swept in upon her solitude and adopted her. More-

over, this curious reversal of the normal method did not stop short at the mere adoption. Miss Julia's theories all asserted that it was for her to take upon herself the discipline of Buddie. Instead, poor Miss Julia had a shrewd suspicion that already, albeit quite without deliberate intention, Buddie was disciplining her. Buddie, that is, plus Ebenezer.

Miss Julia sighed softly, as she hung her frock across a chair to dry. Then, donning a kimono, she sat down in another chair, took Pet-Lamb into her arms and prepared to review the situation.

Just eight days before that very afternoon, she and Pet-Lamb had been drinking tea together, placid and mannerly. At four o'clock and fifty-one and one-half minutes, there had been no symptoms of a break in their well-mannered placidity. At four o'clock and fifty-one and three quarters minutes, Lena had entered the room and shattered that placidity as with a brazen hammer. And since then? In contrast to what had gone before, something akin to elemental chaos.

And yet, even apart from the sentimental reasons which had bound Miss Julia over to keep the peace, Buddie was not a disagreeable boy. At least once in every day, he washed himself with a fair degree of care. He neither grabbed for things at table, nor talked with his mouth full. Moreover, when he remembered, which was not too often, he tightened his necktie and turned down his cuffs at dinner. He was truthful and moderately courteous, and, most astounding fact of all, blacked his shoes without being told but once. To Miss Julia's mind, this last fact was little short of a miracle, a twin miracle to his being punctual at breakfast. Indeed, on one or

two occasions when her morning nap had been ruthlessly smashed to atoms by Ebenezer's bark and Buddie's swooping scrabble down the stairs, Miss Julia had found it in her heart of hearts to wish that her young nephew would sometimes be a little tardy.

After all the years, though, of her quiet routine, Miss Julia needed a good deal more than eight days to grow accustomed to the echo of the boyish voice, to the clump and the exceeding dustiness of the boyish boots, to the irresponsible chatter during meal hours, the freaks of mischief which came cropping out, each now and then. For those past eight days, Miss Julia seemed to herself to have been undergoing a series of nervous shocks, each one different from all its predecessors, each one a little more unexpected than the last. Each night at dinner time, Miss Julia had uttered a silent prayer for patience to carry her through the intervening hours till bedtime. Each night at bedtime, Miss Julia had bade the boy good night, knowing that her life was broader, sweeter for their comradeship. Buddie, clattering down the stairs at crack of dawn, Buddie, ready for any fun the day might offer, was quite another Buddie from the one who, evening after evening, lay on the rug at her feet, and told over to her all the long day's history, or else, erect and thoughtful, his brown eyes on the embers between the andirons, talked to her of Daddy, of their good times together, and of the length of the period which must elapse, before those good times could begin again.

And so a week had passed away, a week when Miss Julia had alternated between dismay at the sudden responsibility which Fate had heaped upon her, and complete and irresponsible pleasure in the form which

this responsibility had taken. She had hours of wondering a little whether this new care might not cut in undesirably upon her leisure for books, and for her civic club, and for her embroidery and Italian classes; whether it might not tie her down a little, might not prove a little narrowing. However, it was only an episode. It was unavoidable, yet not of her own making. She would take it as it came. If only — Her fingers poored Pet-Lamb's brow very gently. If only there had not been the additional responsibility incarnated in the frowsy Ebenezer!

Buddie, meanwhile, had gone away with Teresa; and Ebenezer, as a matter of course, had gone, too. Teresa's errand had been a sudden one. Only that very morning, it had occurred to somebody or other that it was Sandy's birthday; and Teresa had put in a prompt petition that Buddie be included in the celebration.

"I don't see why you did n't think of it before," Buddie had chidden her, with the arrogance of one whose birthdays are a matter of respectful consideration.

"Oh, it's almost always somebody's birthday at our house," Teresa told him casually. "We can't always be counting up ahead; it would take too much time. Besides, we generally think of it, by the time the day is over. Still, it does seem as if we each one of us might remember our own days."

"But you can't well tell of them ahead," Buddie objected.

"Why not? I do."

"It's just the same as begging for a present," Buddie argued, a little bit disdainfully.

"Not us. We don't have presents," Teresa cor-

rected his mistaken idea. "We could n't, such a tribe of us. It would make — Let's see." She lost herself in some deep computation. "Nine; times ten; plus twice ten. One hundred and ten," she announced triumphantly at last. "It would take one hundred and ten presents, every year, that we children would be making. And my father is n't a millionaire, by any means."

"Oh." Buddie realized that his answer was flat anticlimax. "What do you do, then?"

"Just celebrate, the way we're going to do now."

"What are you going to do?"

Teresa chirped to Ebenezer, to distract his mind from the memory of Pet-Lamb.

"They had n't decided, when I came away," she answered, with the casualness which already Buddie was learning to reckon as one of her most charming characteristics. "Plenty of time to settle all that, after we get the baskets packed."

Contrary to Teresa's predictions, however, Sandy had been the recipient of one present. Duncan, the senior of little Tootles by a scanty eighteen months, and hence comparatively unversed in matters of family tradition, had insisted upon presenting Sandy with a mechanical mouse. Moreover, for a wonder, the mechanics of the mouse were quite intact. With the best intentions in life, Eric had bestowed the mouse on Duncan, the preceding Christmas; and Duncan, after his one convulsive yelp of terror at the sight, had insisted that the mouse should be kept under an inverted tumbler on the nursery table, always with a piece of cheese to bear him company. Sandy, who hated the flavour of cheese, received the mouse politely, but without

enthusiasm. It was left for Buddie to foresee its latent possibilities.

"Great!" he exclaimed, as Sandy, his nose ostentatiously averted, wound up the mouse and put him through his paces. "I'll give you my second best baseball glove for him, Sandy. Say the word, and I'll go over and get it for you now."

Sandy did say the word, and the mouse changed hands. Not the glove, however; at least, not till the next day. The completeness of the exchange had been delayed by the appearing of Teresa, a paper bag in one hand, little Tootles in the other.

"Basket's packed," she announced laconically. "Come along, you two."

## CHAPTER SIX

### AUNT JULIA'S DINNER PARTY

BUDDIE'S first real mutiny occurred upon the night of Miss Julia's first real dinner party after his arrival.

"What for should I eat at second table?" he demanded, after Miss Julia had made known her plans concerning the how and where of his repast.

Miss Julia smiled, and the smile irritated Buddie.

"At your age, Ernest, you could hardly expect to appear among my guests," she told him, and her accent was of the unchastened Miss Julia of the days before Buddie's advent.

Buddie's answering smile should have disarmed the stony heart of Madame Grundy herself.

"Guests be hanged, Aunt Julia! Don't I belong here?" he said, and there was more of affirmation than of question in the words.

"Indeed you do, Ernest," she assented. "I shall be lonely enough, when you go away again. However, that does n't enter into the question that we are discussing. At your age —"

"What's my age got to do with it?" Buddie argued. "As long as my table manners are all right, I can't see what difference it makes, whether I'm fourteen or forty."

"It's not alone your manners," Miss Julia had a chilly consciousness that she spoke pedantically.

"At a dinner party, Ernest, the people are supposed to be able to converse."

"Hh!" Buddie's accent spoke volumes. "Do I generally keep still?"

Miss Julia gave a little sigh. This was by no means the first time that she had found it hard to corner Buddie in an argument. She shifted the ground of her reasoning with what seemed to her astounding wiliness.

"Besides," she added, quite as if she had not heard his last remark; "I am not at all sure that their talk would be especially interesting to you, Ernest."

"Try me and see," he dared her promptly. "I'll risk it. Besides, maybe I could turn it the other way about, and make things interesting for them. It's our place, you know," he added with a naïveté which, Miss Julia suspected, was not entirely genuine; "to make things interesting for our guests."

Miss Julia caught him up quickly.

"It is our place, Ernest, to find out what our guests are interested in, and then to talk to them about it," she corrected.

Buddie suspected an intentional lesson veiled in the correction. He shied away from it promptly. He had a manful fashion of preferring to take his pills in all their naked bitterness. This species of sugar coating he regarded as an insult to his common sense and to the ultimate regions of his digestive apparatus.

"Who's coming, anyhow?" he demanded curtly.

"Judge Elgar and his wife, and Mr. Baldwin, and the Bishop and his wife, and some other people you don't know. Mr. Baldwin," Miss Julia added

craftily; "is the man who is writing all those articles about the need of stricter discipline of boys."

Buddie shied again.

"Are the Hamiltons coming?" he asked.

"Oh, no."

"Why not?"

It was Miss Julia's turn to shy.

"They don't go to dinner parties."

"Why not?" pursued her remorseless inquisitor.

The whole code of social science was involved in Miss Julia's answer. Moreover, the code, seemingly so simple, in reality became suddenly complex, when viewed by Buddie's downright eyes.

"They don't know the other people," she said, at length.

"But they know you, and you could introduce them," Buddie argued.

"I could; but —"

"And you told me that you liked them; that they were nice people; and that you'd like to have a daughter just like Teresa," Buddie continued to argue.

"Yes. Only —"

"Then why don't you ask them to your dinner?" he demanded point blank.

Miss Julia started to reply. Then suddenly she remembered that Pet-Lamb was shut up in the library and wailing loudly. She went in search of Pet-Lamb, and forgot all about coming back again.

All this was after breakfast. At noon, Buddie renewed the discussion; at least, in so far as it concerned his own place at the table. To his surprise, he found Miss Julia obstinate, stony-hearted. Arguments failed with her, and cajolings, and even threats

of boyish vengeance which left her outwardly calm, but inwardly uneasy. Those past days had taught her much, regarding Buddie's ingenuity in finding out a way to get the best of any situation. Buddie at last gave up, however, and departed on his heels, irate in temper and injured in his boyish feelings.

"She need n't feel so smart about her darned old Bishop!" he soliloquized profanely, once he had locked himself up in his room, his heels on the rungs of his chair and his elbows on his knees. "Anybody that wants can get a bishop; but it is n't everybody that has an only nephew from New York. And she thinks I'm not good enough to eat at table with the Bishop! And she's leaving me to go hungry, or else eat up the scraps left over in the kitchen!" Buddie's imagination was working grandly now. It worked more grandly still, as he went on. "Like as not, I'll starve. Aunt Julia would n't care, though, as long as she had her Bishop, and could give him pork chops and ice cream. But, when I'm gone —" Buddie shook his head at Ebenezer with such solemnity that Ebenezer whimpered in sympathy with the sorrowful picture that his master's words suggested.

Then silence fell upon the room, a mournful silence. Ebenezer's gray eyes only beheld his master; but Buddie's eyes, blind to the loving face upturned to his, were fixed upon a distant vision of waving greensward and white marble, his mind busy with weighing the relative attractions of *neglect* and *broken heart*, as phrases descriptive of the reasons for his own demise.

From consequences to penalties, the mental step was but a short one. The corners of Buddie's lips stopped drooping, and he clutched his red head

with his hands, and then began to rub them up and down across his hair. In time, of course, Miss Julia would repent. However, it was only fair that he, the sufferer, should have a share in arranging for the inevitable repenting. He rubbed his head more and more slowly, as he thought and thought. Then, of a sudden, his heels slid to the floor and, letting go his head, he brought his hands down on his knees with sudden gusto.

"Got it, Ebenezer!" he announced, softly, but in a tone which dismissed Ebenezer's worst misgivings. "That's what!"

And, greensward and gleaming marble alike forgotten, he fell to rummaging among his best shirts in the bottom bureau drawer, where he had stowed away the trophy he had bargained for and won, on Sandy's birthday.

It became necessary to shut out Ebenezer on the stair-top, while Buddie tried out the motor and assured himself that everything was all in order for his plan. That done, wrapping his treasure in a handkerchief, he tucked it back again among his shirts, opened the door to the wailing and suspicious Ebenezer and, serene of brow and whistling softly to himself, went down the stairs, out of the house and through the garden, in search of Teresa.

And Miss Julia, who had been experiencing her own bad half-hour, looked after him with misty eyes.

"Dear child! It is so hard to refuse him anything," she said. "It's all the harder, too, because he takes it all so sweetly. I wonder if I really could n't tuck him —"

Because it was Saturday afternoon and still

early, quite as a matter of course, Buddie sought Teresa at the playhouse. To his surprise, he found the playhouse door inhospitably locked against him. Nothing daunted, he applied his snub nose to the nearest window pane. The place was quite deserted, save for the scape-goat, Rosa, who, prone in a corner with her face to the floor, bore mute witness to the total depravity of things in general.

Buddie smiled in perfect comprehension.

"Here, too!" he muttered, as he turned away. "It's evidently in the air, like dogdays."

He found Teresa at last in the place which seemed to him least likely, the family kitchen. Guided thereto by the clatter of many dishes, he halted to ask a question as to Teresa's whereabouts, before he really was aware that Teresa herself would be the recipient of the question.

"Well, what are you doing, I'd like to know," he questioned banally.

"I should think you might know, without the asking," Teresa retorted.

Buddie shut his lips and considered. The trail was over everything, that day, it seemed. Teresa was undeniably testy, and for no reason under the sun. Well, let her.

"Been having an extra big dinner party?" he made further question, as amicably as he was able.

Teresa cast upon him a glance which showed quite plainly that she would far more gladly have cast on him her stick dishcloth.

"Dinner party!" she echoed. "No. This is work."

"Is n't the other?" Buddie queried.

"No. Not the same way." The water splashed,

as a pile of plates was lowered into the pan. "Saturday, too!" Teresa grumbled then. "It's always that way."

"What way?" Buddie did not intend to be rude nor stupid; but Teresa's meaning was opaque to him.

Teresa turned upon him in a fresh wave of exasperation.

"Do come in and sit down, Buddie," she ordered him; " not stand there in the door and ask questions like a katydid."

Mercifully for Teresa's poise, Eric was not present to remind his sister that katydids were not, as a rule, inquisitive; and Buddie ignored the language in the fact. He edged into the room, sat down gingerly on the nearest flat surface, and prepared to offer sympathy. Before he could offer it, however, it transpired that once more he had made a blunder and aroused Teresa's ire.

"Look out!" she said shortly. "Don't sit on that pieboard; it's all over flour and shortening. I do wish boys would ever look at what they're doing."

Buddie arose, dusted his nether surface with the palms of his hands, and once more settled himself, this time on top of one of the set tubs in the corner.

"What's the row, Teresa?" he queried then.

The suds swashed angrily about the dishes. At last, —

"Everything," Teresa made comprehensive answer.

"Of course," Buddie assented pessimistically. "But give it a name."

"It's Horace," she burst forth suddenly. "It

always is one of those boys or other. I wish I were the oldest sister of an only child like you. Then there would n't be all these dishes to wash."

Buddie bowed to her logic, although he regretted it that the compliment to himself, seemingly so imminent, should have faded into so prosaic a statement of unsentimental fact.

"What's Horace done now?" he asked, as sympathetically as he was able.

To his surprise, Teresa turned and rent him in his sympathy.

"You need n't say *now*, in that superior tone," she snapped. "Horace is as good as you are, any day in the week."

Buddie shook his head. Teresa was undeniably testy. Still, there never was any particular sense in arguing with a girl. Accordingly, he held his peace.

"I should think you might say you were sorry for the poor little boy," Teresa chid him, after she had become weary of the silence.

"What's happened to him?" Buddie asked her warily.

"A perfectly terrible toothache." Teresa emphasized her words by means of her stick dishcloth, and punched the bottom out of a china cup. "That's always the way it is!" she lamented, in a sudden recurring wave of self-pity. "Somebody goes and gives Horace a ten-cent piece because he is so cunning; and he buys hard candy, and has a toothache, and keeps poor mother awake, all night long, Friday night, too; and then I have to give up my holiday, and spend the whole livelong morning in the kitchen, peeling potatoes for that awful

tribe of boys to eat, and then washing up the dishes when they've finished." Teresa's woe rose to a climax. "And I was going to take you to the place I told you about, Sandy's birthday."

Buddie's heart melted promptly at this unexpected manifestation of Teresa's continued good will towards himself.

"Were you really, Teresa? That's fine of you. But it's early yet. Maybe, if I pitch in and help you, there'll be time for us to go. Here, give us that mop. I'd break 'em, if I wiped; but I can slosh on water, just as well as you."

And so he could, if flying lumps of suds were any test. Moreover, such was the comfort of his moral support that Teresa smiled and held her peace, even while she surreptitiously scratched away the little sticky blobs of soaked potato which had defied his dishcloth. Together they finished the dishes, together they tidied the room, while Buddie, yielding to the mood of confidence which lay upon the air, told Teresa of his own grievance, beginning with the dinner party and ending with a realistic picture of the waving greensward which had accomodatingly doubled its original proportions and offered place for two repentant mourners, Miss Julia and the candy-eating Horace.

Unhappily for Buddie's feelings, however, Teresa scoffed at the waving greensward.

"Fudge!" she said. "What's the use of dying, just for a little thing like that?"

"Angels don't wash dishes," Buddie reminded her gloomily; "nor have to eat at second table."

"I'd rather eat at second table," Teresa retorted, with some spirit; "than have to live everlastingly

on manna. It would be worse than shredded wheat. Besides, Miss Julia's very good to you."

"So'm I good to her," Buddie objected.

"Yes, perhaps; but not in the same way. And she's good to everybody, always. Even the Salvation Army people say they don't see how they ever could get on without her old hats."

Buddie flushed.

"I'm no Salvation Army sinner," he contradicted curtly.

Teresa replied from her superior pinnacle of girlishness, from, too, her recent depths of testiness which even now were only half appeased.

"No; they only get drunk and steal in places you don't hear about till afterwards. That's nothing like so bad as to have a boy bring a horrid great dog to live in your house, and let the dog carry your nice white cat around in his dirty mouth."

There was a silence, brief, but dramatic. Then Buddie spoke, also briefly, but also dramatically. Then he departed on his heels. It was a bad, black day in all his universe; stormclouds hung heavy in the air. Nevertheless, such insults, hurled at the unconscious Ebenezer, he would not, could not brook. Therefore the things he said are better for the editing.

Buddie spent the remainder of the afternoon in the society of Sandy and of Sandy's chiefest chum, who, by the way, was not the serious-minded Eric. Then, less than an hour before dinner, he came trudging home, with no sign upon him of his mid-day mood of opposition. Later, and hard upon the time for the arrival of her guests, Miss Julia found him standing in the dining-room, apparently lost in

admiration of the brave array of linen and crystal, ferns and flowers which lay outspread before him.

"It is pretty; is n't it?" he said ingenuously, as, hearing the rustle of her frock, he turned to face her. "I thought you would n't mind it, if I just came in to have a look."

Miss Julia's hand rested for a moment on his shoulder.

"Poor old Ernest!" she said. "But I've ordered Lena to see that you get something extra good out of every course." And then she wondered; all at once, Buddie was blushing furiously.

Not long afterward, Miss Julia was destined to know the cause of the blush. Buddie, secreted in the hall closet underneath the stairs, heard the front-door bell ring once, twice, and yet more times. He heard the rustle of feminine best skirts and the tramp of masculine best shoes moving up the stairs above him; he heard the increasing babble of voices, and then the little hush, as the guests started towards the dining-room. By the time he had heard the scraping of many chair-legs on the floor, Buddie could neither contain his curiosity, nor could the closet contain Buddie, any longer. Noiselessly he opened the door, noiselessly he crept out across the hall and halted in the shelter of the half-closed door between the dining-room and hall.

It was a pretty sight upon which Buddie's eyes were resting; he had seen few prettier in his life: the softly-lighted room, the flowers, the subdued gleam of silver and cut glass strewn along the shining damask. At the head of the table sat Miss Julia, the Bishop at her right hand. She was dressed in some sort of fluffy white stuff, and the

green stones of her necklace glistened in the light, as she bent over to say a few words to her neighbour, then straightened back into her chair and lifted up her napkin. It was a pretty picture, and one full of the sober, well-bred quiet born of experience in many similar groupings. But —

Buddie shut his hands across his widening mouth, and counted the seconds until Miss Julia should unfold her napkin.

However, Miss Julia was deliberate, that night. She fussed with her flowers, then gave a smiling attention to a long-winded speech from her left-hand neighbour. Then, the smile still on her lips, her fingers once more shut upon her napkin.

Instantly the sober, well-bred quiet was torn to tatters. There was a single shrill outcry, half of surprise, half fear; there was an answering chorus of yet shriller cries, and of the clashing of disordered silver, and of spatting hands descending heavily upon the damask. Then, above the bedlam, there arose the triumphant voice of Mr. Baldwin, the man who wrote things in the magazines concerning the discipline of boys.

"I've got him!" he trumpeted vaingloriously. And then, in quite another tone, he added, "Oh, by Jove!"

And then Buddie judged that it was time for him to go away upstairs.

Later, much later, Miss Julia came to him in his room where he had put himself to bed without his dinner, hoping, by this self-inflicted punishment, to melt her heart and so to stave off the worst of the inevitable lecture. Miss Julia came and knocked. Then, opening the door, she stood there on the

threshold, a slim pale figure silhouetted sharply against the vivid lights outside. Buddie admitted the graciousness of the vision, even while he braced himself to bear the lashing of the vision's tongue. After all, why not? At least, he had had his temporary fill of fun. Instead, though, —

"Oh, Ernest," she said to him quite quietly; "I wonder if you realized how hard for me you were going to make things."

And then, all of a sudden, Buddie found himself wondering why it was he had not seen till then just how worn-out and trite and foolish had been his cherished joke.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE BOYS' SPORT

SANDY'S celebration, by the way, had been a glorious success, an astounding success, it seemed to Buddie, thinking it over later and considering its elements. It had been a picnic; but none of the customary elements of a modern picnic had entered into its making. They had not ridden anywhere, nor sailed. They had spent no money on sweets, nor yet on souvenir stands. They had just gone; that was all. Of course, they had had a luncheon. Indeed, it was that luncheon which, to Buddie's mind, made the difference between that picnic and all the other picnics of his past life. There were stacks and heaps of food. The number of boyish stomachs to be filled made the amount a matter of primary necessity. There were three sorts of sandwiches, whole-slice sandwiches with the crust on, not miserable little one-bite affairs. And there was thin brown-bread-and-butter, and another sort where the brown-bread was spread with cheese and sprinkled with chopped peppers. And there were three glasses of jelly, and tarts, and a layer cake or so, and a lot of little turnovers, baked that morning and still almost quite hot. And there were some other things too, Buddie explained to Miss Julia, that night, only he had forgotten what they were, except a lot of yellow napkins that it did n't

make any difference whether you spilled things on or not.

They walked all the way there and back again, with Mrs. Hamilton pushing little Tootles in his pram, and all the baskets, seven of them, piled into Horace's express wagon. And they played things, and climbed trees. After luncheon, they sat around for a while and told riddles, and Eric cut up an empty hornet's nest and showed them how the rooms fitted together. All in all, Buddie said contentedly, it had been a splendid picnic, a perfect epoch-maker.

After that, and after the subsequent mirth and penitence attending upon Miss Julia's dinner party, an interval of flat calm shut down on Buddie. In the first place, he was on his best behaviour, result of his penitent discovery that his mouse-y trick upon Miss Julia had left something to be desired upon the score of manners. Moreover, the excitement of fitting himself into his new home had worn itself out a little; and, in comparison with the elaborately simple routine of his former school, this country substitute seemed very humdrum.

True, the boys played baseball and, after a fashion, field hockey; but there were no matches with other schools, matches presided over by masters who tried to cover up their real interest beneath a mask of seeming boredom. The presence of the girls, too, in their section of the yard, changed all things, not always desirably, or so it seemed to Buddie. Teresa was the first girl he had ever really known. He liked her absolutely, taken as an individual; viewed as a type, he liked her not at all. Moreover, he was shrewd enough to notice that Teresa, mingling with others of her type, was by no means the same Teresa

whom he knew by way of the garden fence. She giggled more, and even added emphasis to her words by the use of her elbow. She had more mysteries, too, secrets from Buddie which, however, seemed to be common property among her girl companions. Buddie affected to regard these secrets as too trivial to be worth consideration. The fact of the matter was, however, he was devoured with curiosity concerning them, devoured with jealousy when Teresa stuck up her yellow head, and walked apart, and whispered to the other girls. Strangely enough, though, it was upon the other girls that Buddie laid the blame of all these manifestations on Teresa's part.

All in all, then, Buddie did not like the girls, although, in reality, he did not know them in the least. With them, he was either dumb and glum, or else condescending; and the girls who, at the start, would have been glad to be friends with this new city boy who had come to live at Miss Julia's, realizing his indifference to their charms, tucked their disregarded charms out of sight and showed him only their least winning side. As result, had it not been for Teresa and Miss Julia, Buddie would have turned into a woman-hater of the most crabbed species.

The boys he liked better, even if they had only hazy notions as to team play, and confessed themselves frankly indifferent to the charms of cricket. Sandy was by all odds his favourite among them; and Sandy's close second was the son of the local barber, best runner in the school, a boy who could be downed in any contest without making whimpers or excuses. That he wore quite obvious patches

on his cut-down clothes was a detail which Buddie counted not at all. Any fellow could have a tailor for the buying, he confided to Miss Julia during one of their evening confabulations; but not one fellow in an hundred could match up to Roger's legs and grit.

Miss Julia, born conservative, and somewhat of an aristocrat withal, yet rejoiced at Buddie's point of view. Years since, she had decided that her life would have been a good deal more satisfactory, if only she could have taught herself the trick of taking people as they came. Unhappily, she could n't. Indeed, that had been the reason for the rather empty house; the reason, too, that Miss Julia had never really been good chums with Daddy. Between the two of them, there had never been the slightest friction. It was only that Miss Julia, younger and more finical, had drawn her social skirts aside from certain of Daddy's poorer affiliations. Daddy believed in luxury, if one could have it; he did not think, however, it was the sole measure of all that was best in life. Beside Daddy's life, though, with all its vivid, crowded interests and human ties, that of Miss Julia was like an empty shell, roomy and beautiful, but now and then a little lonesome.

On that account, she confessed to herself that she was really glad of Buddie's invasion of her home. Buddie was curiously like his father, only not so sure of the truth of his own opinions. It was rather interesting, now and then, to get his point of view and to compare it with her own. Moreover, upon one or two occasions recently, Miss Julia had modified her viewpoint until it had matched up with Buddie's own.

And, meanwhile, the days went past them, some slowly, some with a rush which left them seeming like nothing in the world but a swift, happy dream. April had gone, with its irresponsible splashes of rain, its early blossoms and its widening leaves. Then May had come and gone, the gay, sweet May of southern New England, with its warm, breezy days and its long, soft twilights, its belated daffodils and its early strawberries, its whirring, tuneful congregation of bird and insect life. To Buddie, who had known spring only in the asphalt streets, with an occasional Saturday in the Bronx, or a yet more occasional week end in the real country, this on-coming of the summer was a delirium of delights. There were so many walks to be taken afield, so many birds to watch and, it must be stated with all due regret, sometimes to chase; there were so many early butterflies to add to his collection; there was a whole thicket of potential canes and whistles, a stone's throw from Miss Julia's back fence. Above all else, there was the brook.

During that early edge of summer, Buddie assumed in swift succession the functions of ship builder, navigator, engineer and irrigation expert. He launched boats of every description, until Miss Julia, asked to name them, was finally forced to fall back upon the tables in the Book of Chronicles. He widened the channel and built a dam which delighted the remaining ducklings, but brought down upon Buddie a lecture from Mr. Hamilton who was so narrow-minded as to object to the consequent flooding of his new asparagus bed. However, Buddie found a joy even in his affliction. With Sandy in his war-paint to represent the Kaiser and

to command the invading fleet, Buddie tore the unappreciated dam to pieces, drowning the fleet in the escaping tide. Unhappily, however, he almost drowned the Kaiser, too, and sent him home to the long-suffering Mrs. Hamilton, with muddy water dripping from his raiment and forming miry pools all over the scene of his confessional.

The dam gone, and Sandy temporarily out of disgrace again, the two boys set to work once more, this time to build a fleet of Dreadnaughts. During these days of feverish toil, they established a sudden claim to cousinship, and addressed each other as George and Bill. As the day of the launchings approached and the naval war came near at hand, party spirit mounted high. Teresa, especially, flung herself into the international crisis with a will, and rashly promised to manufacture flags for all the ships of both sides. Next day, after an unavailing struggle to copy the triple cross of the Union Jack, she suddenly changed her mind and clambered down from the political fence she had so ostentatiously bestridden. She said it was on account of her relationship to Sandy that she had descended on the German side; but Buddie, coming upon the scattered débris of her earlier efforts, had his doubts. Miss Julia shared the doubts and, liking Buddie's stoic reticence upon the subject, she made a hasty trip to town, the morning of the battle, and came home with a dozen tiny Union Jacks in her bag. It was the most natural result in the world that, an hour later, the flagship took the water as the *Julia*, not the *Britannia*, as had been announced beforehand. Moreover, lined up on the bank above the battle, Miss Julia Tenney outranked the assembled and

opposing Hamiltons, that afternoon, in enthusiasm if not in noise.

The absurdity of the whole situation struck Miss Julia not one whit. Instead, she had a modest sense of humdrum duty overpraised, when the victorious Buddie laid the dripping flagship at her feet and swept his arm across his weary brow, as he remarked, —

"Bully for you, Aunt Julia! 'T was your yells that kept me going."

Afterwards, though, Miss Julia had a time of wondering just why the boyish appreciation seemed to her so sweet.

If Sandy was defeated and swept off the political map of Europe, at least he bore his adversary no grudge. Next morning early, the first morning of June, he went in search of Buddie.

"Circus, next week," he announced laconically.

"How do you know?"

"Saw the man starting to put up the posters."

"When?" Buddie demanded, as his fingers went in search of his pocket.

"Wednesday."

Buddie withdrew his hand.

"No good to us," he said regretfully.

"Why not?"

"School."

"Shucks!" Sandy retorted, with an uncouthness for which Teresa, had she been present, would have smitten him sorely. "We'll be back in time."

It was Buddie's turn to stare.

"In time?" he echoed.

"Yep." Sandy's vocabulary felt the near approach of the circus, to its own disadvantage. "It

generally gets in at between four and five, and it takes about an hour to get unloaded. That 's before six, and it 's only three miles, if we don't go out to see it set up, so it ought to get us back by breakfast time."

Strange to say, Buddie experienced no difficulty in disentangling the thread of Sandy's meaning.

"See it come in!" His eyes blazed at the thought.

"Sure! What else? It's better than parade, any day, even if there was n't school. Sometimes they let you get in close enough to feed the elephants."

"That's nothing." All at once, to Sandy's surprise, Buddie turned disdainful. "We always do that, after the show is over, quarts and quarts."

"Who's talking about the show?" Sandy asked impatiently.

"I am. I always go, of course."

Sandy's impatience increased a little.

"No *of course* about it; that is, not when there are ten of you," he contradicted.

"But there are n't. You need n't all go," Buddie said, with a kindly attempt to simplify the problems of the Hamilton clan.

Sandy turned upon him a disdainful stare.

"Where'd you stop?" he queried, with the air of one who propounds a poser.

And Buddie had the grace to admit that he was posed. Where, indeed, could one create a gap in the close line that stretched downward from Teresa to the little Tootles who, though potential master of his first tooth, yet still lacked a more specific name.

By mutual consent, the two boys elaborated their plans in secret. Buddie had suggested the inclusion

of Eric; but Sandy had been prompt to down the suggestion.

"He'd do a speech about every last animal that comes overboard," Sandy objected. "I'd rather take a geography on a birthday picnic than have Eric on hand at such a time as that. If he goes with you, then I take Roger for mine."

The threat was quite sufficient with one uttering. Buddie liked Roger; he was not altogether sure that he cared to have Sandy like Roger, too; in any case, not to the point of intimacy.

"What about Teresa?" he inquired.

Sandy dismissed the query in three words.

"She's a girl," he said, and he saw no need to elaborate his meaning.

Buddie, however, was not so certain.

His certainty increased a little, though, as Sandy sketched in the details of their plan. They would arise at three o'clock, on circus-day morning; not because it was absolutely needful, but because they both would feel a little safer with the odd half-hour as margin. Besides, a fellow never really slept well, with a thing like that upon his mind. Buddie could set his alarm clock, if he chose; but Sandy, with a disdainful sniff, announced that he did n't want a clock, nor any one to call him. And calling would be sure to stir up the others, Eric in particular, since Eric shared his room. Buddie and he would meet out on the lawn at Miss Julia's. They could have some biscuits ready in their pockets, over night; and they could eat them as they went along. It would be after four, before they reached the side track in the railroad yard where the train came in. They would have a full hour and a half of bliss,

before it would be time to set out for home and school. And how they would tell all the others about it, once they did reach home! Sandy paused to extract from Buddie a violently-worded pledge to the effect that he, Ernest Angell, would not mention the matter at school till he himself, Alexander Hamilton, was at hand to share in the narration.

"After all, though," Sandy added rather rashly; "there's no reason all the other fellows should n't do it, if they only had the brains to think it out. It's easy. The walk is n't anything to brag of; and, at this end of summer, three in the morning is n't so awful early."

Buddie ventured to repeat his former plea.

"Then why can't Teresa go?" he asked once more.

"No place for girls," Sandy asserted masterfully. "The elephants might stampede, or they might tip over a cage and let a lion out, or a constructor —"

"A — ?" Buddie had not the slightest intention of rudeness. It was merely that he did not quite catch Sandy's meaning.

Sandy took the query snappishly.

"A snake," he said; "only there's more than one kind. Still, no matter about that. But, if an accident should happen, and Teresa should be there, then where'd she be, with all her skirts to run in? Besides," he added, plainly as an afterthought; "she would n't get ready in time. Girls don't. The best thing for us to do, Buddie Angell, is to shut our mouths and not tell one single soul what we are going to do, until we've done it."

Much to his own reluctance, Buddie yielded; and the two boys shut their mouths accordingly. In fact, so far as their plans were concerned, they

not only shut, but locked, them. However, they did this in a fashion so ostentatiously secretive that it would not have taxed the brain of little Tootles himself to have discovered that a mystery was on hand, and scheduled to come off on the next Wednesday morning. Little Tootles, however, was too busy cutting teeth just then to feel much interest in any lesser trifles.

Monday came and went, and Tuesday dawned, raw and gray, the sort of day which tries the soul of one planning for the morrow. More than a dozen times, as the day waxed and waned, Sandy and Buddie had short, secret-looking interviews regarding rain coats and sweaters, or flannel blouses and "sneakers." When, after a seemingly interminable evening, Buddie at last went to bed, his room was lined with garments laid out ready for any emergency which might arise, and his alarm clock was set punctually at two forty-five.

Only a little later, it seemed to him, he was wakened by the alarm clock pounding away beneath his pillow. At first, he ordered it to go to sleep again, from a mistaken notion that it was Ebenezer. Then he recollected the expedition looming up before him; and, after a momentary wish that the late Mr. Barnum had never come across the threshold of this world's existence, he yawned, dragged himself out of bed and then burned his fingers badly, in trying to light his bedroom candle.

"Shut up, you!" he said savagely at the alarm clock, whose monologue was still unfinished.

That waked up Ebenezer, whose sleep was never so heavy as to render him deaf to his master's voice. Ebenezer yawned in his turn and then, beholding

Buddie's unmistakable preparations for departure, let off a lusty yap of pleasure.

Buddie shook his head, as he went stumbling down the stairs. He had left the bedroom candle to solace the loneliness of Ebenezer, whose mournful lamentations were plainly audible throughout the otherwise silent house. This sort of thing might be good fun; but even the purest pleasure has its base in pain. And Sandy had lied flagrantly, when he had said that three o'clock in the morning was not so very early. Buddie shook his head again, as the door groaned out its protestations, when he sought to open it.

Out on the lawn, Sandy had said, Miss Julia's lawn. Buddie had all the details of the plan at his tongue's end. Aware that he was early at the tryst, he stepped out on the dewy stretch of turf now blanketed with the thick gray shadow of the night. He looked about him. Early as it was, he could make out a figure waiting in the shadows. Sandy so early? As he drew near, the figure hailed him; not in the voice of Sandy, though.

"Hullo! Ready?" said the voice, and Buddie jumped as though a Gatling gun had gone off in his ear.

"Teresa!" he exploded, as suddenly as if he had been the answering gun.

"Yes. Hush, though; don't roar about it." Teresa's voice sought to appear unconcerned; but Buddie fancied that he could make out a little throb of excitement beneath the unconcern.

"What are you doing here, at this time of night?" he demanded, with masculine bravado.

Teresa refused to be bullied.

"Waiting to have you get up and take me to the circus," she responded calmly. And then she added, by way of making her welcome doubly sure, "Take the basket, please. I put in a few things for early breakfast; I thought we might all get hungry on the way."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE ARRIVAL OF THE CIRCUS

IT was a full minute before Buddie rallied. Even then, too dazed to open argument, he attacked the lesser issue.

"Where's Sandy?" he inquired.

Teresa shrugged her shoulders.

"How should I know? Asleep, I suppose."

"But he told me —" Buddie was beginning.

Teresa cut in upon his phrase.

"To meet him on the lawn. Of course. But, if you had known Alexander Hamilton as long as I have, you would n't have expected to find him here before breakfast."

Buddie stared at her in the dawnlight, too astounded at her perspicacity to discuss the question of Sandy's punctual habits.

"How did you know about it?" he demanded.

Teresa's reply was curt.

"I'm no mole, and I have common sense and a pair of ears. When that Sandy goes to work to hatch up a plan and keep it secret, he might as well take a megaphone and stand on the post office steps and announce it, at the start. It would n't hurt the mystery any, and it would save him lots of trouble."

"Perhaps," Buddie assented slowly, for he had had his own occasional misgivings upon that same subject.

There came a pause between them. While the pause lasted, the sky was turning from dun to pearl, and a distant cock began a solo which swiftly led into a perfect fugue of *cockadoodles*.

"Well?" Teresa said interrogatively then.

"Well, what?"

"Are you coming?"

"Without Sandy?" Buddie's voice was horrified.

Teresa laughed.

"Apparently you can't very well come with him, unless you go get into bed between him and Eric, and that would n't take you far on your way to the circus."

"He said he'd come," Buddie reminded her a little feebly, for his confidence in Sandy was waning with the waning night.

"So he will, next to-morrow," Teresa said loftily. "Still, if you want to wait and lose the circus —"

"I don't," Buddie protested.

"I put almost a half a pie into the basket," Teresa remarked to no one in particular. "There are n't so very many people in the world who realize how good pie tastes for breakfast."

The pie accomplished more than any amount of argument.

"Come along," Buddie said shortly. "If Sandy catches you, though, you'll get a licking." For, at three o'clock in the morning, Buddie's chivalry was so far asleep as to leave him convinced of the necessity for putting Teresa into her proper place once and for all, before she was allowed to set out upon their expedition.

None the less, he put out his hand for the basket. His tongue might lag and grow balky in its obedience

to his daytime sense of decorum; but Buddie's creed forbade his walking off beside a girl and leaving her to carry a burden designed for their common benefit. He held out his hand for the basket, then; but, to his supreme surprise, Teresa refused to let go her hold upon it. In this, Teresa showed her wiliness. Long since, in dealing with her many brothers, she had learned the exceeding wisdom of keeping her hand shut fast on all her trumps, whether those trumps were of pictured pasteboard or of pie.

"That's all right," she asserted promptly. "It is n't heavy; I'll carry it. Come along."

Buddie hesitated for one final instant, gave one glance at the Hamilton house, quiet among its trees, gave another glance up at his own window where a gray and bearded face was peering down upon him, a world of reproach in the tilted head and in the fond gray eyes. Then, without a word, he turned and followed Teresa to the road.

Long years afterward, Buddie came to look back upon that daybreak walk with a tender and appreciative pleasure, as one does look back upon such choice bits of experience which have been disdained or disregarded in their time. Mellowed by a long perspective, he could see rare beauty in the coming of the dawn, the slow change from bluish black to palest gray and from palest gray to something akin to faint, faint rose, and then the blotting out of all the fainter colours, in the sudden flood of gold which came bursting from the East. He could hear rare music in the early bird-songs, in the first twitters that seemed to be questioning of one another whether the dawn had really come, and in the swelling chorus that sang the jovial march which ushered in the

fuller day. He could feel rare joy in the touch of the dawn wind on his freckled cheeks, in the crunch of the crisp, dew-soaked grass beneath his heels, in the companionship of Teresa who trudged along beside him, chattering irresponsibly. All this he could see and hear and feel — long afterward. In the time of it, however, he was only aware that it was half-dark and chilly, that the soaked grass was wetting his shoes through and through, that he was very sleepy and tired, and that he did wish that Teresa — and the *that* was no conjunction, but rather an adjective, betokening disapproval — would hold her tongue and let him think what excuses he could make to the irate Sandy.

"Let's have some pie," Teresa suggested suddenly, with one of the intuitional flashes supposed to be characteristic of her sex.

Heretofore, her words had fallen upon inattentive ears. Now, Buddie came to swift attention, although his dignity demanded that he should not seem to assent too eagerly.

"Well," he agreed, as dubiously as his ravening inner man would let him.

Teresa once more realized that brevity is the soul of wit, and of wisdom, too.

"All right. Catch hold."

Side by side in the green grass of the roadside, they squatted on their heels. Buddie made the best lap he was able, to support the basket, while Teresa poked aside the coverings, drew out a good third of an apple pie, and then broke it into ostentatiously uneven portions.

Buddie's asperity relaxed somewhat, as he watched her.

"Oh, I say, that is n't fair!" he protested; but nevertheless his teeth shut around a scallop of the larger piece.

At this point in the later recollections, his memory always decided to leave a blank. Stone-cold, day-old apple pie, broken off raggedly and eaten, alas! from the flat of the hand! And at four o'clock in the morning upon an empty stomach! Unthinkable! However, in its hour, it tasted good. Regardless of his garments, he sat back firmly and Teresa sat beside him, while they munched and munched in a contentment which left their hearts and mouths too full for utterance.

Such periods of silent rapture, as a rule, are short-lived and fleeting. This was no exception to the rule. Silence and rapture both were shattered speedily, as a roar of rage came hurtling down upon them from the rear.

"You mean old pair of — tabby cats!" the voice proclaimed, and the welkin rang with the fervour of the proclamation.

Teresa glanced back over her shoulder at the irate vision dashing down upon them, an unkempt and dishevelled vision with spiky hair, and one garter gone on strike, a vision whose collar and necktie were waving in its hand.

"Hullo, Sandy!" she observed dispassionately. "Waked up at last? My soul, what a mess you're in!"

"Mess! You — you — !" In vain Sandy sought his vocabulary through and through, in search of an epithet worth consideration. "What are you doing here, I'd like to know?"

"We 've eaten up the pie. You 'd better

have a doughnut," Teresa advised him dispassionately.

"Doughnut be hanged!" Sandy said, with some violence, though his fingers shut about the smooth brown ball. "What do you mean, Buddie Angell, by rushing off like this?"

Buddie proceeded to show his kinship to Father Adam.

"Teresa said —" he was beginning.

Teresa interpolated, and loftily.

"Sneak!" she said.

Buddie turned to rend her. Cold apple pie, eaten in the chilly dawn, does not make for righteousness and peace.

"I am not a sneak, either. It's the plain truth. You told me Sandy would n't wake up in season to do any good. Anyhow, I'd as soon sneak and tell the honest truth as I would stick myself in where I was n't wanted."

There was an instant's silence, while Buddie waited for evidence that he had scored. Sandy, though, was too busy gobbling doughnut to speak out, while Teresa with an air of unconcerned superiority was punching and patting at a mysterious lump which had appeared inside the front of her frock. Under her dexterous manipulations, slowly the lump slid upward. Once, midway in its course, it appeared to get stalled. Then it moved on again until at length it came in sight above the edge of her low collar, a gray ooze purse, manifestly much the worse for wear. Teresa's brow, which had grown troubled during the punching process, cleared suddenly, as her fingers closed upon her treasure. Then she proceeded to score in her turn.

"Are n't I wanted, then?" she demanded, as she snapped open the clasp and displayed a silver coin within.

Buddie eyed her frigidly, determined to show no consciousness that she had trumped his trick; but Sandy, bending forward to peer in, lost himself in swift calculations. All the peanuts they would care to eat, and at least a dozen "suckers" besides! Hurriedly he gulped down the last of his doughnut and arose.

"You're It, Teresa!" he assured her. "Now come along, and see who'll get there first, us or the circus."

"Us" got there first, a long two hours first. The railroad, or else the circus, appeared to have changed its mind about the hour of the arrival and unloading. The dawn grew into day; the few loungers waiting by the track increased to a little army; Teresa's basket was emptied and the napkin hunted over for stray "tastes" that might have adhered to it in the hasty unpacking, and Sandy, departing at a gallop after peanuts, had time to stroll back again as slowly as he chose and then to eat up his share without undue haste; and still the empty rails throbbed to no lilt of the incoming train. Buddie and Teresa, tired of waiting, settled themselves in a gravelly ditch beside the track; but Sandy, who had resumed his avowed leadership of the expedition, strolled to and fro in the crowd, man-wise, discussing the probable reasons for the delay and asking incisive questions which suggested critical disapproval of the railway president. Obviously, there was fault somewhere or other; and it would have been inconceivable to Sandy to blame

the circus. At length, he paused in his gyrations and diverted the stream of his criticism until it fell on Buddie.

"If you'd waited, as I told you, we should n't have had to sit here, all this blasted morning," he explained severely. "You might have known you were going to be hours and hours and hours too early. I suppose it was because you were so set on coming. Still, you might have waited for a fellow. How do you suppose I felt, when I waked up and went to the window to find out how early it was, to see the heels of you and Teresa just going down the other side of Shingle Hill?"

"How did you see our heels, if we were going down the other side?" Teresa asked, with pert pertinence. "We were n't walking on our heads, Sandy."

Sandy's exasperation led him to forget that Teresa represented the commisariat of the expedition.

"I do wish you'd keep still, Teresa. I should think you'd rather, anyhow, when you know you were n't asked to come with us."

"Who ate the extra doughnut?" Teresa queried of a distant corner of the heavens. Then she added casually, "It must be almost time for breakfast. Buddie, do go and ask one of those men what time it really is."

"Maybe they've left their watches at home, as I did," Buddie suggested, loath to rise, lest Sandy should appropriate the comfortable nest that he had fashioned in the gravel.

"They would n't be such geese," Teresa told him ruthlessly. "Do go along."

And Buddie went. His countenance was anxious when he came back again.

The chariots, though, were covered ; the beasts, for the most part, invisible. — *Page 99.*

"Quarter past eight!" he said, and his voice matched his countenance. "What will Aunt Julia — "

But Sandy cut in.

"Glory! No school for us!" he proclaimed shrilly. "And we could n't help ourselves, when we did n't have a clock. Besides — Hi! There she comes!"

And, in all truth, there she did come, a long line of flat cars sliding down the track, of flat cars laden with tarpaulin-covered chariots and with gilded cages. Teresa watched its slow approach, until it halted, with a great gold cage filled with invisible and roaring beasts drawn up exactly opposite the sand heap where she had been sitting. Then she heaved a sigh, less, however, of penitence than of fulfilled content.

"Well," she said philosophically; "the mischief is done before this, anyhow. Now we're here, we may as well stay and see it through."

And see it through they did, down to the unloading of the last great chariot, down to the placing the last tentpin in the waiting vans. Taken as a spectacle and apart from its suggestiveness of greater things to come, it was not especially satisfactory, save in the case of the elephants who seemed far larger, even Buddie admitted, trudging across the railway ties than in the circus tent. The giraffe, too, insisted upon having his lid taken off himself; and, from the top of his own neck, gazed haughtily down upon the minions who were busy disembarking him. The chariots, though, were covered; the beasts, for the most part, invisible; and the tent contrivances, heaped untidily together, lost all their glamour and looked soiled and shabby beneath the garish morning sun. Nevertheless, —

"What's the matter with our walking up the street with it a little way?" Sandy suggested, as, after a seemingly unending delay, the cavalcade set forth towards the circus grounds. "It won't be much out of our way; and, anyhow, we're late to school, so all we've got ahead of us now is to be sure to be on time at lunch."

Buddie grumbled a little about being hungry; and Teresa, as in duty bound, offered a languid protest. However, Sandy's will was dominant. Without wasting time in profitless discussion, he took Teresa by the elbow and hustled her off upon the heels of the departing procession. Moreover, by the time they had passed a dozen blocks and entered one of the main thoroughfares of the city, Sandy's generalship had been so eager and his enthusiasm so infectious that they all three of them were keeping pace with the squad of dusky elephants, quite at the head of the procession. Ten blocks later, they met and passed Miss Julia's friend, the philosophical Mr. Baldwin. Mr. Baldwin knew them all by sight, wondered a little at their being in such a rabble, wondered yet more at the capacious basket dangling emptily from Teresa's hand. But Buddie, who of them all had best reason to remember Mr. Baldwin, stared through him with unseeing eyes, and quickened his step to keep up with the elephants, suddenly grown aware that breakfast was now almost at hand.

Arrived at the circus grounds before they actually knew it, no mortal human beings could have been expected to withstand the temptation of looking on at the breakfast ceremony. Neither was it possible to tear one's self away, while the great gilded

cages were being uncovered, and the long-tailed horses groomed and harnessed for the street parade. And then, quite at the other end of the grounds, the two-headed giant came strolling into view, talking quite affably with the fat lady out of his left-hand mouth, and settling the diamond in his necktie in quite an ordinary fashion. The whistles were blowing for twelve o'clock, when the weary trio mounted the crest of Shingle Hill upon their homeward journey. If their hearts were aware of any grim forebodings, at least they also held the pleasant consciousness of having made the very most of all their opportunities.

"I s'pose we'll all three get a licking," Sandy remarked meditatively, when Teresa called his attention to the whistles; "but I don't know but it will be worth while. I have n't had such fun since the comet. How is it with you, Buddie?"

"I've had my money's worth, for sure," Buddie asserted stoutly.

But Teresa, clutching her empty, withered-looking purse, had her doubts. For her, the question was a literal one.

Great was Miss Julia's consternation, that same morning, when it transpired that Buddie was nowhere to be found. The mere fact of his being late to breakfast was too common an occurrence to cause Miss Julia any uneasiness, until, all at once, she remembered that she had not heard his customary clattering descent of the front stairs. Then she sent Lena up to Buddie's room; but her uneasiness, increasing fast and faster, sent her hurrying on Lena's heels. What if the boy were ill, or dying? And all alone, without her hands to nurse him, her loving

sympathy to cheer him in his pain? Mistress and maid stood side by side upon the threshold. The maid knocked and waited. The mistress turned the doorknob and looked in.

No Buddie was there; only Ebenezer, lying on Buddie's pink pajamas thrown across the disordered bed, lying there with his great head upon his paws and his shaggy body shaken with long, sobbing sighs of utter lonesomeness.

At the sight, Miss Julia quite forgot that Ebenezer, only the day before, had been chastised for using Pet-Lamb's head for the handle by which he carried her across the room. She hugged the great dog to her heart, the while she made distracted query, —

"Where is he, Ebenezer? Where — e — e's Buddie? Where has Buddie gone?"

But Ebenezer, his durance ended, his heart cheered by Miss Julia's apparent sympathy, sought to cheer her in his turn. He pulled away from her embrace, dived underneath the bed and reappeared triumphantly, to offer her the least dilapidated of the store of bones he kept secreted there. At another time, Miss Julia would have followed up the horrified censure suggested by Lena's exclamation; but now her mind was filled with other things, or, to be more literal, with one other thing alone: the present whereabouts of Buddie.

Search availed nothing, even with Ebenezer's aid. Indeed, from all appearance, Lena judged that the dog was in the secret with his master and pledged to tell no tales, so impenetrably did he gaze into their faces and refuse to follow up any suggested scents. And, as a rule, Ebenezer had showed him-

self past master of trailing anything he wished, from Pet-Lamb down. Now he merely yawned and looked self-conscious.

Miss Julia, meanwhile, was beginning to look anxious. Search failing, she took her anxious countenance across the yard, to demand the sympathy and advice of Mrs. Hamilton. A mother of ten should be far better able to cope with an emergency like this than was a solitary spinster, herself a youngest child.

Miss Julia found Mrs. Hamilton tranquilly engaged in washing up the breakfast dishes, although two clean plates upon the table betrayed the fact that breakfast was not ended for all the Hamilton family.

"Teresa and Sandy have n't come in, either," she said, with a cheery calmness which sounded to Miss Julia's ears something little short of callous. "The three of them may be off somewhere together. Dear knows what mischief it will turn out to be, when Sandy has a hand in it."

"But are n't you very anxious?" Miss Julia quavered. "Buddie's father never would —"

Mrs. Hamilton's fat, comfortable laugh broke in upon her words.

"Anxious? Not I. Bring up ten of them, Miss Julia, all of them healthy and none of them especial dunces about concocting mischief, and you'll get over being anxious. Leave them alone and they'll come home. Only, when they do come home, spank them and put them into bed, not cry over them as returned prodigals. What is it, Horace?"

"A paper wiv letters on it," Horace responded. "I finded it pinned on to Teresa's bed-pillow."

"Give it to mother, dear." Despite her vaunted courage, Mrs. Hamilton's voice shook a very little. Mischief such as customarily was evolved by Teresa's fertile brain did not call for farewell epistles pinned, after the tradition of all dramatic exits, to the unruffled pillow of her girlish bed.

Obediently Horace handed over the valedictory. Crumpled and soiled by smudgy boyish hands, it had been written on Teresa's very best note paper in Teresa's fairest, plainest hand. Mrs. Hamilton took it, read it and, without a word, handed it over to Miss Julia, waiting breathless at her side.

"Gone to the circus with Sandy and Buddie Angell," it ran tersely. "In case of accident, please notify our nearest living relatives, Mrs. John Hamilton and Miss Julia Tenney."

And this, with an admirable forethought quite beyond her years, Teresa had pinned to her pillow, ready for use in case of need.

## CHAPTER NINE

### IN THE STRAWBERRY BED

PRANKS vary; but lectures are always more or less alike. Accordingly, there is no need to set down here the remarks which followed the home-coming of the weary, dusty trio, nor yet to comment upon the difference between the rhetoric of Mrs. Hamilton and that of Miss Julia Tenney. Most human beings, living now to-day, are in a position out of their own memories to make up the especial brand of phraseology needed. It is enough to say that, among the bright faces turned to greet the teacher when school opened on that afternoon, there were three chastened countenances. Furthermore, it was something more than mere coincidence which brought it to pass that, on that selfsame afternoon, Teresa and Buddie and Sandy reaped each his sole good-conduct mark of the entire term. The all-grasping hand of Fate occasionally condescends to put a finger into even the very smallest pie. A hot-box on a moving freight car enabled Sandy to answer "Perfect!" to the roll call, that afternoon. Unhappily, he forgot the cause, and became disagreeably smug over the unwonted result.

Buddie and Teresa, however, took the matter more to heart, and were inclined to look upon even the golden memory of the two-headed giant with certain reservations. On that account, it was a good

ten days before they either of them felt disposed to talk the matter over much. Even then, the matter swiftly fell out of sight, behind the greater interests involved within Miss Julia.

"She'd make a ripping mother, Teresa!" Buddie asserted, as he suddenly sat up upon his heels to face his companion.

Buddie had found Teresa in the strawberry bed, that morning, an empty basket in her hand, two others by her side, and the sun full upon her back. It was Sandy's work to pick the strawberries; but Sandy had been assailed by sudden prickings of the conscience regarding the currant bushes he had failed to hoe, the Saturday preceding. Hoe in hand and apologies upon his tongue, he had explained to his mother his inability to get ready to pick the berries in season for the midday meal. And Mrs. Hamilton, rejoiced at anything which went to prove that Sandy owned a conscience, praised him effusively and, the others being out of reach, sent Teresa to pick the berries in his stead. Teresa, however, infinitely less guileless by reason of her lesser age, doubted the conscience. The currant bushes were always in the shade till noon. Besides, the mosquitoes vastly preferred the regions of the strawberry bed. She mentioned both these facts to Sandy, who was placidly paddling over the surface of the soil. After that, Sandy wiped his brow, every few minutes, shaking the resultant drops from his fingers with a patient little sigh. Between the sighs, he laid down his hoe and slapped mosquitoes with resounding zeal. Teresa mopped her dripping face, meanwhile, and then sought to scratch herself between her shoulder blades. She had been told, all her life,

that a conscience was an uncomfortable sort of a possession. It was her growing theory that the discomfort usually lapped over upon the next of kin.

"How you frightened me!" she said, a little testily, as Buddie, with a sudden whoop, landed at her side.

"I meant to. Else what 's the good of coming? Unexpected joys are always sweetest," he made tranquil answer.

Teresa, damp and sticky and mosquito-bitten, shook her head.

"Not when they make you jump out of your skin," she replied.

"It depends. Poor soul! You look as if you'd be better off without your skin," Buddie told her quite frankly. "Anyhow, you'd be a whole lot prettier."

"What is the matter now?" Teresa asked, with a chastened sort of patience which struck on Buddie's ears as something ominous.

"Nothing much; only you've frescoed yourself with mud and strawberry juice till you look a trifle hectic, not to say heated. Jerusalem! What big berries! It ought n't to take more than a dozen to fill a basket."

"That's all you know about it," Teresa told him wearily, for she had struck a spot where the fruit was small and lean.

"Here, give us a basket," Buddie ordered. "I'll race you, starting even."

"You'll eat," Teresa protested.

"Not a one, 'cross my heart," Buddie declared. "You need n't be so stingy, though; there's bushels here. I never saw such berries in my life."

"You see them, every day of your life," Teresa

said contradictiously, for even under the lure of Buddie's jollity, her sombre mood died hard.

"How then? I was never here in my life," Buddie asserted, for the strawberry bed was in a remote corner of the Hamilton grounds and, so far as Buddie was aware, he had never penetrated to it before.

"Miss Julia has them on her table, all the time."

"Honestly? Are these those?" Buddie queried, in rather involved phraseology. "Do you send them in to her like that?"

"Yes. And she sends us out the money," Teresa answered baldly.

"Sell them?"

"Yes. We are n't millionaires." A mosquito inside of Teresa's ear was in part responsible for the invidious accent on the pronoun.

"Neither are we. I wish we were, though," Buddie said, with sudden gloom.

Teresa forgot her mosquito in the interest of the next question.

"What would you do then?" she demanded.

Buddie's reply surprised her by its fervour. She had not looked for it from his happy-go-lucky self.

"Stop Daddy's having to go off on this disgusting trip. If he were the father of a millionaire, he would n't need to."

Teresa stopped her picking.

"You miss him so much as that?" she queried.

"Sure." Buddie's fingers never stopped their busy picking, and his eyes were on them, not on Teresa's face.

"But you know he's coming back," she said, with what she felt to be adequate encouragement.

"So do you know the mosquitoes will stop biting, when the frost comes. That does n't keep the bite from hurting now," Buddie replied, with prompt allegory drawn from his immediate surroundings.

"No; but — And Miss Julia is so good," Teresa urged again.

"So are the strawberries," Buddie told her gloomily. "And yet, one can't well use them for a plaster." And then, all of a sudden, his sense of fun came back upon him, scattering his gloom. "Apparently, though," he added; "that's what you have been trying your best to do."

Teresa had the rare tact to accept the laugh against herself.

"If I did, it does n't appear to have done much good," she told him. "You don't seem to think that it has improved my personal appearance."

"I've seen you worse," he answered judicially.

She laughed.

"When?"

"The morning we came home from circus."

Teresa flushed.

"I was n't smudgy then."

"No," Buddie said candidly; "but you were awfully tousled, as if you had slept in all your things."

"So I had," she confessed. "Buddie, now it's all over, do you ever wish we had n't?"

He shook his head slowly.

"No; not really. But I'm not sure I'd do it over again."

"N-no." Teresa's tone was dubious. "Not if I could see the very end of all the consequences. Otherwise —"

There came a little pause. Buddie broke it.

"I'd be willing to bet," he said pensively; "that Aunt Julia talked it over with your mother and got points out of her, to know what to do about it when I got home. She'd never have thought it up, herself."

Teresa sighed, and her tone matched that of Buddie in its pensiveness.

"Mother is very ingenious," she said.

It was a little later on that Buddie had made his statement concerning Miss Julia's maternal possibilities. In the interval, the baskets had been filled, and then, at Buddie's suggestion, two others. It seemed unlikely, measured by his present rate of progress, that Sandy would finish hoeing out the currant bushes in season to pick strawberries for dinner. Questioned, Sandy admitted that he did sit down quite often. The pebbles kept getting inside his shoes, he explained. If he did n't take them out again at once, they would wear holes in his stockings, and so make work for mother.

The reasoning was unassailable. It also went to prove that the motors of Sandy's conscience still were working at full speed. Dropping further questioning, Buddie recurred to the subject of Miss Julia, and, in the end, uttered his magnificent tribute, —

"She'd make a ripping mother."

Settling back on her own weary heels, Teresa spoke thoughtfully.

"All the more pity that she is n't," she said.

"I wonder how it happened," Buddie remarked at nothing in particular.

"Happened!" Teresa's voice sharpened just a little.

"Yes." Buddie spoke in tranquil unconsciousness of any disrespect of womanhood. "That no man ever asked her."

Teresa fluffed up her feathers, and spoke like a militant suffragette.

"What if he had?" she asked.

"Why, she'd have married him, I suppose, and then," forgetful of his earlier promise, Buddie chose out and picked and ate the fattest strawberry in sight; "then she'd have had a whole lot of children."

"How do you know she'd have married him?" Teresa asked as truculently as if the question had not seemed to concern itself with a purely imaginary *he*.

"Women always do."

"They don't, then."

"Prove it," said Buddie languidly, while his eye measured the rival attractions of the berries at his feet.

"Miss Julia is n't married," Teresa told him, in a voice of triumph.

"No; but —"

"And she got asked." The triumph grew.

It grew still more, when she saw Buddie forget the berries and turn to stare at her with widening eyes.

"For a fact?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"She told my mother."

"How do you know? Did you listen?"

Teresa's colour came.

"I don't sneak, Buddie. Mother told me, of her own accord."

"Oh." Buddie's face fell. "I did n't think it of your mother. But go on."

Teresa shut her teeth upon a bitter memory. Then, rather than have her mother blamed unjustly, she spoke out.

"It's mean to corner me into telling you about it, Buddie; but, if I must — I got mad at Miss Julia, one day, for — Well, no matter what. She was n't to blame. But I went home and told my mother she was a meddlesome old maid, and a whole lot of other things. Really, I was very mad. And then, after we had talked a long, long time, mother told me."

"Who was it?" Buddie asked her, as soon as he could discover a comma.

Teresa shut her mouth with ostentatious tightness.

"I promised my mother that his name should never cross my lips," she said, when she opened it again.

"Well, don't tell it, then. But do I know him?" Teresa parried.

"How should I know the people you know?"

"Hh!" Buddie grunted. "Does he live around here?"

"Not now."

"That means he used to," Buddie made swift comment.

"Of course," Teresa said, a little injudiciously. "How else would she get acquainted with him?"

"She goes to places; does n't she? And I suppose she must get acquainted with people, when she's at them." Then Buddie went off upon a fresh tack. "What's the reason she did n't marry him?" he demanded.

"I suppose she did n't care about it." Teresa's tone was slightly top-loftical.

"Fudge! That's no reason," Buddie objected promptly.

Teresa flopped forward on her knees, and, without a word, fell upon the berries and picked furiously. Buddie, still squatting on his heels, eyed her askance, and wondered what could be the meaning of this sudden devotion to her uncompleted task. He was merely a boy, and simple in his mental processes; he could not be expected to know that Teresa was bursting with her superior knowledge which was of no earthly use to her, unless she could display it and demand his respectful admiration. But, after her prelude of mystery and reticence, how could she display it, without apparent loss of dignity? Without in the least realizing her dilemma, Buddie supplied her with an exit from it.

"Go on and tell, Teresa. I don't leak. Besides, it's fair that I should know, when I'm the only man about the place."

With apparent reluctance and actual delight, Teresa yielded. It seemed to her that Buddie's final reason was a cogent one.

"Well, perhaps," she said. "Fill up your basket first, though, and then do come and sit in the shade while we cool off. It's getting worse here, every single minute."

Obediently Buddie fell to work and, for an interval, their fingers flew. Not until their baskets were heaped, and they themselves were seated in the shade of a gigantic cherry tree, did Teresa speak again.

"It was six or seven years ago," she said slowly,

while she unpinned her hat and, putting it down beside her, lay back at ease upon the thick, soft grass. "He was very nice and very good-looking, mother says; and he loved Miss Julia with all his heart and soul and strength and —"

Buddie interrupted, with a flat question.

"And did n't Aunt Julia love him?"

Despite the disadvantages of her position, prostrate on the ground, Teresa nodded slowly.

"That's the most dramatic part of it all," she said. "Mother thinks she did."

Buddie sat up, resting on one elbow.

"Then why the dickens did n't she marry him?" was his not unnatural question.

"They were both so young; and she doubtless was afraid," Teresa quite obviously was quoting now; "that he could not satisfy her later womanhood."

Buddie waxed uncouth. Teresa always irritated him, when she became feminine and pompous.

"Shucks!" he said. "Give it a name, Teresa; or else, cut it out."

"You asked me," she reminded him.

"I did n't ask you to be so everlastingly high-falutin'. I wanted the bare facts," he told her.

Teresa sought to scourge him with her superior wisdom.

"Bare facts are only the skeleton of any romance," she observed, with her eyes upon the leaves above her head.

"Romance be hanged! I want to know what Aunt Julia found wrong about the fellow. Did he drink?"

"No; of course not."

"Or smoke, or steal, or forget to black his boots, or drink out of his finger bowl?" Buddie made swift enumeration. "Don't be a mule, Teresa. Now you've started, do tell it all, or nothing."

Teresa might have caught at the opportunity to point out to him that it was her plain duty to tell him nothing at all; but her desires were all the other way. Accordingly, —

"How can I tell you, when you keep interrupting?" she demanded. "No. It was n't any of the things you said. It was something far less commonplace, something far less easy to live down."

Buddie closed his eyes and yawned, by way of hinting to Teresa that she seemed to him a little bit long-winded.

"Fire ahead!" he bade her languidly.

Teresa suppressed a vague desire to box his ears. She would have yielded to the desire, in all probability, had it not been sure to prove an unromantic interruption to her tender theme. Therefore, she went on much in her former vein, her best vein, as it seemed to her.

"Miss Julia is a lady —"

"Sure!" Buddie interrupted once again.

Teresa ignored the interruption.

"— and he, poor man, was lowly born —"

"You don't say!" Buddie rolled over to face her, in his sudden interest. "Was he a plumber, or what?"

Teresa repressed her growing impatience. Always it had seemed to her that this early romance of Miss Julia held within it all the elements that go to the making of a successful novel. It was hard indeed, the first time that it fell from her lips, to have it

meet with this kind of a reception. Sometimes a downright, practical demand for information is more disheartening by far than any criticism. Once more she assumed the weapon of her inherent superiority, the superiority of any girl to any boy of her own age, or younger.

"How foolish you are, Buddie!" she rebuked him. "Miss Julia would n't know a plumber, unless when he was lying on his stomach in her pipes. No; this man was in the insurance business; but he had a little money, and was most refined, most. But, even then, Miss Julia felt she could n't."

"Could n't what?"

"Marry him, you —" Teresa hesitated, as she chose her shot with care. Then, "you funny child!" she said.

Disdainful of the shot, which failed to penetrate his mental skin, Buddie rolled over on both his elbows and spoke at the grass.

"I don't see why not," he said.

"All of her friends were college people, or else professional: bishops and that sort of thing," Teresa explained down to him, with no little condescension.

"What of that?"

"And he was n't."

"I don't believe it," Buddie burst out illogically. "Anyhow, there must have been some other reason."

Teresa shook her head.

"I don't believe there was, for Miss Julia cried, when she told my mother; and, if she'd felt sure the reason was a good one, she'd have been ashamed to cry," she told Buddie, with a logic far better than she was aware.

"Then — Perhaps, some day —" Then Buddie

made a fresh start. "What became of him?" he demanded.

"He went out west," Teresa answered vaguely.

"What for?"

"To bury his sorrow, I suppose." Again Teresa sought the dialect of the romancer.

"More likely to make his fortune, or study a profession, and then come back and marry her off hand," Buddie retorted prosaically.

There was a little silence. Then Buddie spoke out again.

"If that's what ailed him, what about Mr. Baldwin?" he demanded. "He's in the real estate business, and she asks him out to dinner."

"Mr. Baldwin is an author. He calls himself a sociolo-something, and writes things about boys," Teresa explained severely.

Buddie sat up eagerly.

"Bet you he is n't a professional," he assured his companion. "A professional does things for money; that's why the college teams are n't any better, you know. Mr. Baldwin does n't write his things for money, only for the fun of hearing himself go off."

"How do you know?" Teresa demanded, in her turn.

Buddie bestowed upon her the cold glance of his disapproving scorn.

"For a bright girl, Teresa, you do make an awful goose of yourself sometimes," he chid her. "Mr. Baldwin does n't sell his things, because nobody would be fool enough to buy them. He's probably a good deal more than satisfied to get them house room for nothing."

Teresa waived the question.

"Anyhow, she did n't know him till years afterward," she said. And then she lifted up her voice in sisterly rebuke. "Sandy! Alexander Hamilton! You just put that book in your pocket, and go back to work!" she ordered, with a swift lapse from her unaccustomed mood of romance.

But Buddie went his homeward way, silent and very thoughtful. The romance of Miss Julia was furnishing him with food for meditation, then, and long afterwards. According to Buddie's loyal mind, the simple justice of the universe should see to it that Miss Julia's life should be kept free from all regrets. Else, what was the use of being so good to other people, and to dogs like Ebenezer, who sucked her pet white cat into a sodden ball of dingy, tangled fur?

# CHAPTER TEN

## VACATION

IT was during the vacation time, curiously enough, that the studious Eric had his innings, the gay vacation time of summer when most of all one would have looked on him as candidate for Coventry. Instead, once the first days of irresponsible idleness were at an end, fun dragged a little, became unsatisfactory. Amusement lagged, when one had nothing in the world to do but to amuse one's self. Lacking the spur of inward conscience and outward opposition, even Buddie's inventiveness began to fail, and both he and Teresa confessed that Sandy's bubbling stream of prankishness began to bore them. And then Teresa had applied herself to her hated needle and begun a piece of embroidery which, she confided to her mother, would turn into a nightie just exactly like the ones they bought in Paris.

Buddie, meanwhile, bored by Sandy and forsaken by Teresa, betook himself in search of Eric. His original intention had been to mock at Eric's hobbies and, with the assistance of the willing Ebenezer, to put to flight the rabble of beasts and birds with which Eric loved to surround himself. Instead, finding Eric enthroned as king over a perfect colony of turtles, box and snapping and plain mud, Buddie fell a victim to their charms, and invited himself to a seat upon the throne at Eric's side, with Ebenezer,

an unwilling captive, held fast between his clasping knees. Moreover, so great became his interest in the behaviour of the piebald colony spread out before him that, before he realized it, he had passed from amused exclamation into animated question, and Eric was expounding at top speed. That was the beginning of the mischief. Before the week was ended, Buddie was lying in the grass, flat, at Eric's side, watching a golden-throated oriole in the tree above his head.

"You'd better come with us, to-morrow," he advised Teresa, that same night. "Really, once you get a little used to him, Eric is n't so bad a bore as one would think. Anyhow, it's better than sitting in-doors, this weather, and sewing holes into a piece of cloth."

Teresa sighed a little. In her heart, she was coming to agree with Buddie that, in a world so full of interesting things, all made and only waiting to be understood and admired, the slow creation of French lingerie nighties was a weariness to the flesh and a total superfluity as well. Nevertheless, Teresa was loath to confess that she had been wasting time and cloth and eyesight on the flimsy, dainty things; the more so as, at the start, the boys with one accord had denounced them as "girl duds," and as "piffling nonsense." Accordingly, she effected a compromise and, joining Buddie and Eric in their explorations, took her work afield. Her theory, stated in advance, was that she could work, while they waited for things to happen. As a matter of fact, her sewing gathered grime and bits of woodland green far, far more swiftly than it gathered stitches; and Teresa's mother, looking on in silence, came to the accurate conclusion

that it spent a good deal larger portion of its time underneath her daughter's placid head than between her daughter's active hands. However, Mrs. Hamilton was wise. At Teresa's age, it seemed to her, it was far better to lie on one's back and watch things grow and flutter in the sun, and listen to Eric's wise expoundings, than it was to sit, a crumpled little bundle of muscles, and weary one's young eyes and nerves by setting even the daintiest of stitches in even the finest cloth. Time for that, later on. At fifteen, a girl should grow, and breathe, and realize the beauty and the wisdom of the world around her.

Not all of the summer daylight, though, by any means, was spent in lying prone upon the grass. Only two miles distant was the bay, choppy and salt, but safe except in hours of violent storm. Buddie's summers at the real seashore had taught him to swim almost as soon as he could walk; and, for his years, he was an expert boatman. Accordingly and obedient to a hint in one of Daddy's letters, Miss Julia had given him a boat, a green-and-white, slim little dory which he named *The Julia*, in prompt gratitude. The first day out, with her for his sole passenger, he had proved to her, past all gainsaying, that he was master of the art of rowing. The next day after, perchance in grateful remembrance of her own preservation from the perils of the sea, Miss Julia had made over to him the key of a small green boathouse which possessed the extra charm of a pair of cubby holes that could be used as dressing-rooms. From that time on, Buddie's bliss was quite complete; and, in a slightly less degree, so was the bliss of Eric and Teresa. Sandy was out of it completely. He

hated swimming, and he was so reckless that, after a time or two, Buddie refused to have him in the boat. Therefore Sandy, scorning to lament, went his way with the other boys, and left the older trio to their own devices.

And great devices they were, too. There were swimming matches, in the mornings; there were diving contests, and games of tag when the one "it" swam under water, and the other ones caught him by his splashing. At the first, Teresa could float a little and Eric could swim a paltry dozen strokes. By the end of the first week, under Buddie's skilful instruction and goaded by his merciless "dares," they were well-nigh as fearless as their master, and quite as strong.

In the boat, the story was the same. Teresa, after catching her first inevitable crab or two, developed a smooth, strong stroke, while Eric delighted in the steering which he reduced to a set of mathematical propositions that centred in the sun and the north star. Unhappily, however, the star part had to remain pure theory, for Miss Julia had laid down one steadfast rule: the boat must be locked up inside the boathouse, at least one hour before the sun set.

In all these pleasures, Ebenezer took an active share. Out in the woods, he returned, breathless, from little forays, his jaws distended with his trove. Sometimes he brought back only puffy oakballs or knobby bits of wood to lay down at his master's feet. Sometimes he happened on a turtle, or a young green frog, or a furry fieldmouse, and once, with every manifestation of anxious care, he laid a half-grown chicken into Buddie's lap, and then backed off and

barked out his apologies for having yielded to temptation.

When the three of them put on their bathing suits, Ebenezer became well-nigh hysterical in his joy. He knew it would be his place to act as umpire in the swimming matches, scrabbling up and down the shore in the warm, wet brown sand, or prancing out ecstatically into the edge of the waves, to greet and congratulate his young master, as he came striding up to him from the sea. And then, when they lay in the sand to rest and gossip, it was Ebenezer's turn to be the centre of attraction. It was Ebenezer whom they buried in the sand, until, of a sudden, he sprang up and shook himself, and covered them completely with the flying grains. It was Ebenezer who dug out their deepest wells, and broke through their highest dams, and sat down ruthlessly upon their most successful tunnels; Ebenezer who, weary of the fun, curled himself up across Buddie's bare and sunburned legs and took his forty winks, while the others decided what would be the best thing to do, next but one. But, in the boat, he was a different Ebenezer, wide-eyed and thoughtful, with a look of wonder on his great gray face, as he watched the shining sea slide past him. From the first day on, there had been no need for Buddie to chide him for his restlessness. Ebenezer's wise gray head seemed quite able to grasp the fact that he who would go boating must needs sit very still. And sit he did, not lie down at his ease and sleep, for, lying, he would have lost his outlook on the summer sea.

And so it came about that, as the summer waxed and waned, the slim green boat, *The Julia*, became a well-known sight about the bay, always with its

same crew: the grave-eyed Eric at the helm, Buddie and Teresa at the oars, and, in the bow, the great gray dog, erect and vigilant.

Daddy, meanwhile, appeared to be spending the summer at the beck and call of a whimsical patient whose soul was set on solitude. At least, so Buddie reasoned from his frequent letters. At first the letters had come from the heart of the Adirondacks. Then, as the summer advanced and the heat increased, they came out of eastern Canada, a region vaguely described by Daddy as "the country back of Lake Saint John." From all accounts, it was a region rich in the resources which make the summer life worth while: canoes, and fishing, and big game. Daddy's letters were full of vague allusions to all these things; yet, when it came down to the literal fact, Buddie could never discover that he actually did them. That set him to wondering a little. He wondered even more when, early in July, Daddy wrote with apparent pleasure that he was growing fat, Daddy who always had prided himself upon his grayhound sort of leanness. However, the letters sounded quite contented, save for their inevitable expressions of regret at missing Buddie; and wonderings, at healthy fourteen, by no means always are the same as worry.

Twice every week, once by promise, once as a a sort of postscript dictated solely by his own desires, Buddie wrote to his absent father. The letters were chaotic in phrase, and they contained more ink than was absolutely needful; but as they also contained a full and accurate record of Buddie's doings, they were none the less welcome for all that. Buddie wrote about Sandy, and the circus, and the brook,

and Eric, and Teresa, and the boathouse, and the new teeth of little Tootles. To save himself description, he relied largely upon illustration, plans of the school, and the playhouse kitchen, and even of little Tootles's lower jaw; pictures of Ebenezer, with Pet-Lamb's tail dangling from among his whiskers; pictures of Miss Julia drinking tea, with Pet-Lamb also drinking tea in the chair beside her; pictures galore of Teresa in all sorts of occupations, pictures recognizable only by the two long tails of hair which invariably formed the decorative portion of the sketch. And the letter always ended with one unchanging phrase, —

"Do hurry home again. I 'm happy here; but I 'm half-dead to see you,

Your sincerely,

Buddie.

O O O O O O O (Kisses)"

And the kisses straggled crazily to the very bottom of the page.

Truly, Buddie's intimacy with his father was suffering in no way by their separation.

That was the summer, as it chanced, of the first wave of the rising tide of the boy scout movement, the tide that, sweeping downward out of Canada, was carrying in its wake a sea of boyish devotion to all sorts of new ideals. At another hint from Daddy, Buddie had been among the first to take the simple oath of obedience and honour and helpfulness to all one's weaker brethren, beast or human. He set the fashion; Eric promptly sealed it. By the last days of July, they were the ranking officers of a promising corps of scouts; and a retired West Pointer, invalided

in some Indian scrimmage or other, had volunteered to take the new corps in hand and see how he could make them like it.

After the manner of his training, he put the scouts upon a warlike basis, with drills in the present, and a hint of rifle competition yet to come. They took to it, as ducks to water. It was novel and interesting and, best of all, the interest did not wane. The retired West Pointer added a weekly lesson in military tactics and talked vaguely about target practise, once the weather cooled. As a natural result, the enthusiasm of the boys mounted to fever heat. It even held to its temperature under the chilling discovery that the retired West Pointer was going to make the target practise depend, not upon their military drill, but on the way they held to the moral oaths that they had taken.

"Not for reward, boys," he had told them curtly. "It's only just that no fellow should be expected to shoot straight, unless he can live straight. It's all-round straightness that you scouts are after. That's all. Break ranks!"

Teresa cavilled loudly at the organizing of the scouts. Always, heretofore, she had made it at once her duty and her pleasure to do all the things the boys did and, furthermore, to do them well. Here at last was something they could do, from which she, of palpable necessity, was excluded. It was the first real grievance of her life, and she not only took it hard, but, contrary to her usual self-reliant custom, she also took it to her mother. To her disappointment, she found her mother too much absorbed in the increasing toothiness of little Tootles's gums and the consequently increasing instability of little

Tootles's temper, especially by night, to be a wholly sympathetic confidante. Accordingly, Teresa went, the next day, to Miss Julia.

Miss Julia's sympathy proved to be everything of which a girlish heart could dream. She asked just questions enough to show that she was fully interested; but not enough to suggest that perhaps she could not understand. Then she explained to Teresa what a help to the world at large the scouts were bound to be, not in case of war especially, but for every one in trouble, or weak, or needing to talk things over and be advised. And then she went on to speak of the girls' share in helping on such things, to talk about relief-corps work, and to tell about certain money-getting fairs which had been the social events of certain war-times.

Afterwards, Teresa went her way, grateful, thoughtful. There was a meeting of all the girls, that same afternoon, at the playhouse. Four days later, Teresa was able to announce triumphantly that, the Thursday but one before school opened, the girls were going to have a fair upon Miss Julia's lawn, and that the proceeds of the fair were to be given to the boy scouts, as nest-egg of a fund to buy their rifles.

"I say," Buddie remarked reflectively, when the announcement reached his ears; "I must say it's awfully decent of Teresa to do this."

Miss Julia smiled out at the summer darkness which, on such nights as these, replaced the fire as setting for their bed-time confidences.

"I think it is, Buddie," she agreed. "Moreover, you boys have n't any notion how hard it was for her to see the justice of it."

"Of?" Buddie said inquiringly.

"Of her being left out of the thing itself."

"But she could n't. She's a girl," Buddie argued placidly.

"Exactly. Later, she'll like it. Now, though, she takes it as a limitation, as one would take some sort of a disease. On that account, it's all the finer of her, Buddie, to take it as it comes, and to go to work to help you on with the very thing she'd love to do, but can't."

There came a thoughtful silence. Then, —

"Sure!" said Buddie, and his voice expressed full conviction.

Miss Julia let the silence continue for a little longer.

"Perhaps that's one of the places where your oath comes in," she suggested finally.

Buddie, squatting at her feet, with Ebénezer beside him and Pet-Lamb upon his knickerbockered knee, looked up, with manifest perplexity writ large upon his snub-nosed countenance.

"I don't see it," he confessed.

"No?" Miss Julia queried. "Granted the girls are out of it, Buddie, entirely out of it, is n't it for you scouts to make it up to them, in some way or other, for the good times that they are losing?" Then she changed her theme and, with her theme, her accent. Even four little months' experience of Buddie had taught her that it was best to leave ideas to work their own way home to him, not for her to seek to drive them. "Buddie," she asked, with abrupt alertness; "have you ever heard me say anything about Ethel Davenport?"

"Not that I know of," Buddie answered, with supreme indifference.

"She is my cousin's child. It's on my father's side, and so no real relation to you," Miss Julia explained. "She lives in Philadelphia, and is about your age, perhaps a little older. Anyway, she's a bright girl, and a good one, and I'm sure you will like her."

"How can I?" Buddie inquired lazily, as he settled back upon his elbow and watched a belated firefly aimlessly flitting to and fro. "My liking does n't go off by wireless, Aunt Julia; it has to have a track to run on, or else it stays at home."

Miss Julia laughed.

"Then I'll be track," she volunteered. "Ethel always comes here for a week or two in August, and I am going to send for her, next week."

To Miss Julia's great surprise, Buddie's first question did not concern himself.

"How does she pull with Teresa?" he demanded.

Strangely enough, his demand struck full to the heart of a situation to which Miss Julia had been vainly hoping to keep him blind.

"They don't know each other very well," she evaded.

"That's queer. Staying next house to each other, and the same age, and all," Buddie made reflective comment. "Still, girls are queer fish, anyway."

Miss Julia judged it would be better to ignore the slander to her sex. For the present, she had more personal interests at stake.

"Teresa has been away from home, once or twice," she evaded again. "Besides, she is so busy with the boys and at home."

"What's your Ethel like?" Buddie asked, heedless of her hard-sought evasion.

"Pretty, and with very nice manners."

"Hh! Can she swim?"

"I — I suppose so," Miss Julia replied, a little bit untruthfully. As a matter of fact, it never had occurred to her to suppose anything about it, one way or the other.

"Like dogs?" Buddie cast one arm across Ebenezer, as he put the question.

"She was very nice to Pet-Lamb."

"Hh!" Buddie said again. "Does she know anything about baseball?"

"Really, I never thought to ask her, Ernest," Miss Julia confessed, her mental perturbation causing her to hark back to the baptismal name which Buddie had hoped was for ever dead between them, save in the stressful moments which had to do with discipline.

Buddie heaved a sigh so portentous that Ebenezer, even in his dreams, felt it incumbent upon himself to echo it.

"Then what is she good for?" he demanded ruthlessly. "For my part, Aunt Julia, I want a girl to be something besides an animated clothes-peg. That's where Teresa scores."

"But, if Ethel comes —" Miss Julia was beginning.

Buddie squared his shoulders. Then he squared his jaw.

"If she comes, she comes, and I'll stand by and do my duty like a man and —" he laughed a little; "and a boy scout. That does n't mean I'm promising to like her, though. It's only that you can count on me to be moderately decent

to her for your sake, and to tolerate her for my own."

And, upon that meagre promise, Miss Julia was forced to rest. Buddie took himself away to bed, once his fiat had gone forth. Next day, and in the next days after, he disdained to refer to the matter, even to Teresa.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### SANDY'S SURPRISE PARTY

"MISS JULIA?" Sandy's countenance was shining-clean, and smug with meekness withal. Indeed, even apart from the fact that, as a rule, he was shy of penetrating within Miss Julia's radius, the unaccustomed combination of meekness and soap would have assured her that he had come to her to supplicate some long-desired favour.

"Yes, Sandy."

Sandy edged a step nearer, for Miss Julia's tone was encouraging.

"Miss Julia, it's going to be vacation pretty soon," he announced, with every appearance of confiding to her Things of Import.

"Yes, I know. Are n't you sorry?" But, even as she spoke, Miss Julia became uncomfortably aware of the triteness of the joke.

Sandy responded with a dignity which might well have rebuked her.

"Yes, Miss Julia. I like my school," he told her, with stern solemnity.

"That's right, Sandy," Miss Julia answered swiftly, feeling herself, the while, an uncomfortable compromise between a guileless, trusting babe and a doting exponent of senile maxims. "I wish Ernest shared your views."

Sandy again spoke solemnly.

"I am afraid that Ernest is n't very studious, Miss Julia. He does n't seem to realize that he can't always be a boy and have the chance to go to school."

This time, Miss Julia's gravity deserted her entirely.

"Sandy, you rascal!" she said. And then they both laughed madly, and the ice was broken.

"After all, you know," Sandy resumed confidentially, after an hilarious interval; "I meant about what I said. We fellows can't be young but once, and I believe in making the most of it. That Ernest Angell of yours," in Buddie's absence, Sandy spoke the tabooed name with infinite gusto; " is beginning to think about growing up. More fool he! The fun is now, not when we move into white ties and whiskers."

Miss Julia looked sharply across at the urchin balanced on the verandah railing. It had not occurred to her that Buddie was impatient to grow up, and she wondered if she had been lacking in perception.

"What makes you think so, Sandy?" she inquired.

"A fellow in white chin whiskers could n't shin up a tree; he'd step on them," Sandy responded, as he hooked his toes into the railing.

"No. I meant about his wanting to grow up."

"Who? Ernest Angell? Oh, he was saying, only just the other day, that he was going to have long trousers, his next birthday. I told him he was so fat and chunky that he'd look like Peter on the signboards; but he said he did n't mind. Bet he did, though." Sandy chuckled.

"Who is Peter?" Miss Julia asked, out of the darkness of her ignorance.

Sandy stared.

"Don't you know? Not honest? Peter's the monkey on the stage, the one that does things, dressed up like a man. I almost went to see him, last year, only I turned out to be five cents short," Sandy explained. Then he recurred to the original reason for his call. "Miss Julia!" he said explosively.

And once again Miss Julia's answer was encouraging.

"Yes, Sandy."

This time, Sandy made a desperate rush across the threshold of his subject.

"Miss Julia, may we boys give Buddie a surprise?" he queried. "We're awful fond of him, you know."

"What sort of a surprise?" Miss Julia asked him, smiling in a fashion that Sandy found as promising as any verbal assent she could have given.

"Why, a party, of course. Come, some evening, and bring our supper."

"But could n't I give you supper?" she questioned, just a little rashly.

"Not if you did n't know when we were coming. Besides," Sandy added; "he'd be sure to smell things."

"He could n't, if I had them cooked when he was out of the house."

Sandy eyed her in swift disdain for the purely literal workings of her feminine intellect.

"I meant rats," he said exasperatedly; "not just the cakes and pies."

Miss Julia withdrew her part of the suggestion, not only by reason of Sandy's exasperation, but

also because of her own sheer inability to plan a party ménu which should include a pie. Instead, —

"Who would come, Sandy?" she asked him.

"All us boys."

"Any girls?"

Sandy wrinkled his nose, in token of disgust.

"We want some fun," he said conclusively.

"Oh." Miss Julia did not mean to be snippy; but this was the only reply she could evolve to fit the emergency.

Sandy's face changed swiftly.

"Oh, you can come," he reassured her. "We'll put a big chair in a corner, and let you look on and be judge of all the forfeits, just as they always do with the grandmother at the parties in the library books." Sandy's accent suggested, by the way, that library books were a class apart, written to fill shelves rather than to be read. Then he swept on, "Of course, Miss Julia, we would n't turn you out, in your own house, and, if you wanted to go to bed a little early, we'd try not to make too great a row, downstairs."

"When do you want to come, Sandy?" Miss Julia asked him, after a silent interval, and her tone assured her anxious guest that her consent was tacitly pledged to the outworking of his plan.

"Oh, some day before very long. I'll talk it up with the other fellows, as soon as I can get them together, without Buddie's being around. No; I can't stop any longer. Good night, and thank you lots." And Sandy, converting the end of his spine into a pivot, swung himself about, dropped on the grass below the rail and vanished into the thick, soft darkness of the summer night.

This was a week before the beginning of vacation, a week when Miss Julia held herself, in mind and larder, braced for a boyish invasion at almost any hour. The evenings passed away, however, without any such invasion being made; and Ebenezer waxed fat upon the goodies surreptitiously poked into his all-devouring mouth, when Buddie was not by to see.

Then school closed and, a week later, came the little boat, *The Julia*, which to a great extent marked a temporary separation between Sandy and his energetic mates, and Buddie. There was no quarrel, no actual coolness. It was merely that they went their ways, apart. To Miss Julia, watching, indeed it seemed that Sandy took the matter very well, regretting, but not resenting in the least, his practical exclusion from the summer interests of Buddie. And Sandy, Miss Julia felt convinced, was neither dense, nor fickle. He made the best of things, and took what came to him ungrumblingly, trying to make the things he had, do duty for all the things he wanted.

However, all things considered, Miss Julia was not in the least surprised that Sandy's party failed to materialize. Indeed, even with her imperfect knowledge of the workings of the boyish mind, she felt convinced that, in the place of Sandy, she would not waste her energies in getting up joyous surprises for the faithless Buddie. For, albeit Miss Julia agreed with Buddie that it would be inadvisable to allow Sandy to upset the boat and drown himself and Ebenezer in the bay, she yet regretted a little the separation growing up between the boys. Still, she was wise enough not to try to

argue them back into their old intimacy. Time and circumstance could do that thing; but never spoken words. She merely rejoiced in secret, when the organization of the scouts brought the two youngsters under the rule of the selfsame hobby. Miss Julia's conscience assured her glibly that it was her duty to prefer the earnest Eric to that freakish imp, his brother. Unhappily, though, one's conscience rarely creates one's real likings. Miss Julia was aware that Eric's influence on her nephew was always for the best. She smiled on him in courteous approbation; but she smiled with Sandy.

Teresa, meanwhile, was becoming a daily guest upon Miss Julia's verandah. The fair was now an established fact. Each afternoon, a bevy of girls were toiling in the playhouse, laying their plans, the while they stitched away at all manner of gay trifles which, as they fondly hoped, would sell like the traditional hot cakes. Teresa was the head and front of the whole undertaking. She took the honours of her leadership most joyously, and yet she would have been the first one of them all to admit that Miss Julia was the power behind the throne.

Since one summer which had begun to write its history in gold and had ended in a blackened, blotted page torn off all suddenly and half-way down, Miss Julia Tenney had known no such absorbing interest as she now felt in the approaching fair. In the intervening years, she had tasted the luxuries of life, nibbling daintily at one and then another: society, sports, clubs, charities. She had enjoyed them mildly, but never to excess. Now, suddenly swept from the placid point of view born of her thirty-one years, she was astounded to feel the

enthusiasms of sixteen surging up within her. It was a wholly new sensation to sit up half the night, deciding whether brown velvet or green would be better for the bodies of the butterfly penwipers; to feed Pet-Lamb sweet biscuits with one hand and sketch her profile with the other, to get her outline for the pussy holders which ought to be on the tea table of every spinster in town. It was something unusual for Miss Julia to ignore the scorching sun of the August mornings, and ransack the shops in town, with Teresa at her side, hunting for bargain ends of silk and ribbon, for dainty or practical odds and ends that could be bought for three cents and sold for ten; hunting and hunting, above all, for new and usable ideas.

Morning after morning, all these hot August days, Miss Julia hurried through her letters and her morning *Times*, while Teresa scrabbled through the morning tasks upon which Mrs. Hamilton insisted. Then together, sometimes sitting upon Miss Julia's wide verandah in the shade, sometimes setting out for scorching trips to town, the two of them attacked the problems of the fair, approving or modifying the old plans and developing others wholly new.

Buddie, as a rule, claimed a good share of Miss Julia's evenings. Nowadays, they often spent them in poring over catalogues of targets and of miniature rifles, studying the pictures and conning the price lists. Miss Julia's older friends, meanwhile, were loud in their complaints over the fact that now she had no time for them. She had little leisure for bridge, still less for consideration of the objects of her sub-committee of the Civic Club. At teatime, of course, her welcome never failed them; but what

pleasure was there in drinking tea on the verandah, with a great lubberly dog standing at one's elbow, waiting to pick up the crumbs, and with a noisy game of baseball in progress out on the lawn below? However, even the most dissatisfied one of all Miss Julia's former cronies was forced to confess to her own mirror that Julia Tenney was looking ridiculously young, that summer, despite the dozen obvious freckles that dappled her Grecian nose.

In this verdict Ethel Davenport agreed, when Miss Julia met her at the station, on the day of her arrival. Miss Julia was looking uncommonly well and happy and young, that day, in her soft white lawn and lace, in her wide white hat with its pink roses. Buddie was with her, and Buddie had been behaving like a veritable imp, all the way in town. Miss Julia's mirth was still in her eyes, and it added to her look of girlishness. And Ethel, who was tired and hot and dusty, and whose ideal was of prim, unruffled neatness, saw the change in Miss Julia, and did not approve.

Ethel Davenport was a Philadelphian, and she looked her name and her abiding-place. After that, there is no especial need of further description. As Miss Julia had said, she was almost fifteen and very pretty, and her manners were so good as to seem a little bit discouraging. Buddie looked her over swiftly, swiftly retired into his shell, and limited his later talk to monosyllables. Between the monosyllables, however, he gained a swift understanding of the exact reason that Ethel Davenport had never known Teresa. Indeed, by the time that they had reached the house, Buddie had also reached the point of uncomfortable wonderings whether, indeed,

Ethel would ever have known himself, had it not been for the social requirements born of spending two weeks under the same roof.

Miss Julia, meanwhile, was watching the two of them with feelings closely akin to fear. Most of all, strange to say, her fear centred itself in Buddie. She had never seen him in that mood before, and yet she knew it but too well: his father's mood, assumed as a sort of protective armour in the presence of strangers whom he felt no especial wish to like, or even to attract, a mood of cool, critical aloofness, as courteous as it was full of a supreme indifference. This was a new Buddie, a veritable Ernest Angell. Miss Julia could pick no flaw in his manner; nevertheless, she dreaded the out-workings of his mood. More than all else, she dreaded the possibility of its being turned upon herself.

To her own surprise, moreover, Miss Julia was finding Ethel a little bit of a disappointment. Asked, she could have told no reason why. The girl was just as pretty as ever and as dainty; her manners showed the same cool, precocious self-possession which always had charmed Miss Julia in past years. Now, though, a good deal of the old charm was lacking. Miss Julia wondered quite uneasily whether the change could be in herself. Was Ethel just the same, and was it that she herself had altered, had lowered her standards just a very little? Was it by reason of her close association with such irrepressible youngsters as Buddie and the Hamiltons? Miss Julia shuddered at her image in the glass, the while she put the question. Awful if she should allow herself to deteriorate! Awful if she should forget the claims of her more than thirty years, and, in her

deterioration, become a senile hoyden! With stoic hands, she hung up in her closet the pale pink frock she had laid out for dinner, and, with a mind as stoic, she hunted out another frock of silver gray, with violet bows and a demure tucker of white muslin. Alas for poor Miss Julia! In the pale gray frock, she looked a girl of the 'teens masquerading as a Quaker, and not at all the sort of thing she had intended.

Buddie met her on the stairs, admired her and, after his wont, gave tongue to his admiration.

"I say, Aunt Julia, that's corking!" he reported, after a detailed inspection of the violet bows. "You look sixteen, and no end 'cute. But what's the dress-up for? Are you going to have a party?"

Miss Julia laughed and shook her head.

"No party, Buddie," she told him. "It's only that we have an extra guest, you know, so hurry and beautify yourself. Else, you'll be late."

And Buddie went.

He reappeared in due season, starched and scoured, his hated dinner jacket on his back and his feet shod in patent leather pumps, while around him floated an aggressive aroma of violet. His manner matched the elegance of his attire, so unfamiliar was it, and so very, very formal. It lent a stateliness, indeed, to the whole dinner, and it made Miss Julia feel uncomfortably conscious of her lack of silver covers and of British footmen.

Half through the serving of the cheese, there came a muffled murmur from outside. Then the bell rang once, twice, thrice, and very violently.

Miss Julia nodded to Lena, and Lena vanished in the direction of the front door. The murmur, stilled

for a moment, arose again at her approach, a murmur compounded of whisperings, and giggles, and of badly suppressed and nasal snickers. Then the voice of Sandy detached itself.

"In the dining-room, Lena? All right. Come on, you fellows; it's all right, really. Miss Julia knows."

What it was that Miss Julia did, or did not, know, Miss Julia herself had only the scantest time to question. There was the slightest possible delay in the hall, a delay of more whispers and giggles and more nasal snickerings. Then there came a tramp of booted heels down the hall, through the library and in at the wide, arching door which led into the dining-room: Sandy and a good score of his fellow comrades, their "party" baskets in their hands, the joyous anticipation written on their faces mingled with something akin to unholy mirth, and their bodies clothed —

Miss Julia gasped, as the boys lined up before her.

Down to their waists, they were accoutred as was seemly. Their jackets and their collars and their ties were irreproachable. But below the belt! Miss Julia gasped again, as her eyes swept down the line. Each boy before her was clothed, as to his lower members, in the paternal raiment, which had been imperfectly adjusted to fit the new dimension. And Sandy headed all the line, Sandy fat and chubby, Sandy whose father was six feet two, Sandy arrayed in the Sabbath trousers of that father, borrowed without permission and hitched up into irregular festoons by means of a long series of safety pins.

There was an instant of utter silence. Then Sandy, catching Miss Julia's eye, waved his basket, glanced

down at his attire and then winked cheerily. And then Miss Julia understood. This was the party Sandy had designed. This costuming was his remonstrance against Buddie's grown-up aspirations. Miss Julia understood, and she laughed suddenly. So Sandy had given them all a good surprise? Then it should be her own turn next. With a queenly dignity, Miss Julia rose from the table and gave a cordial greeting to each boy in line. Then she turned back to the table where Ethel, seated at the farther end and almost invisible behind the great bowl of flowers, had been looking on at the scene with astonished, haughty, disapproving eyes.

"And now, boys, I want you to meet my young cousin, Ethel Davenport," she said, and only Sandy, standing close beside her, could make out the fun in her eyes, as she gave the introduction. "Come here, Ethel. I want you to know the boys and to help me entertain them."

But as Ethel, dainty and elegant, came stepping around the table, in obedience to Miss Julia's request, Sandy cast aside his basket and bolted from the room.

"Oh, fellows, hide me somewhere!" he wailed, as he shot towards the door. "It's that girl, the Philadelphia one! Teresa told me that she was n't coming till next week. Do put me somewhere out of sight, and tell Eric to bring me some sort of decent clothes, and then go, somebody, and wring Teresa's neck."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### PET-LAMB'S BATH

"BUT I liked best the funny little fat one you called Sandy," Ethel remarked, next day.

Buddie chuckled in pleased anticipation of Sandy's relish of the adjectives, when they were repeated into his irate ears. Sandy had aspirations towards being tall and thin and commanding.

"Sandy is a good boy," he responded then, with a curious note of condescension.

"He would n't look so very ugly, either, if he were only properly dressed," Ethel remarked again. "How did they ever happen to put on those foolish things?"

Her tone nettled Buddie. Teresa, in Ethel's place, would have seen the two-edged joke which had come back upon the other boys with far more force than it possibly could have come home to him. Teresa would have laughed and carried on the fun. Ethel had ignored it utterly, treating the strange array of Miss Julia's unexpected guests as she would have treated a black eye, or a damaged nose, something to be courteously disregarded, as too unspeakable for polite society.

On the other hand, if Teresa had failed to grasp the inherent humour of the situation, Buddie would have explained it to her, clearly and at great length. But, instead —

"I think it's time I went to give Ebenezer his breakfast," he said, and straightway he departed.

Ebenezer, however, was only the flimsiest sort of an excuse. Buddie was well aware that the cook had formed the habit of feeding Ebenezer; of stuffing him, rather, since Ebenezer's hearty appetite made him the best sort of clearing house for all domestic waste and culinary failures. Ebenezer was not dainty. He took things as they came, and found no fault with gristley steak, or singed cookies, or rye muffins that were sticky in the middle. He ate them all, wagged his rearmost tuft of hair in token of his gratitude, and smilingly waited for more, until even Buddie cried out at his waxing fatness and begged the cook to limit him to four good meals a day. Nevertheless, on this particular morning, he found it needful to oversee the preparation of Ebenezer's breakfast.

He was too late, however. He found Ebenezer, gorged and languid from much oatmeal and gravy and fried potato and cornbread, and a good drink of milk withal, lying in the sun outside the kitchen door. Between his outstretched fore paws, Pet-Lamb was curled up into a contented ball, now and then stretching out a curved fore paw, now and then rolling over just a very little, to manifest her pleasure in the friendly attention which Ebenezer was lavishing upon her. As the attention took the form of a thorough-going licking, not chastisement, but literal tongue-polishing, it is doubtful whether Miss Julia, looking on, would have shared Pet-Lamb's perfect pleasure. The dog and cat lay on the soft, bare brown earth; and, in the course of Pet-Lamb's rolling to and fro, a good share of the soft brown

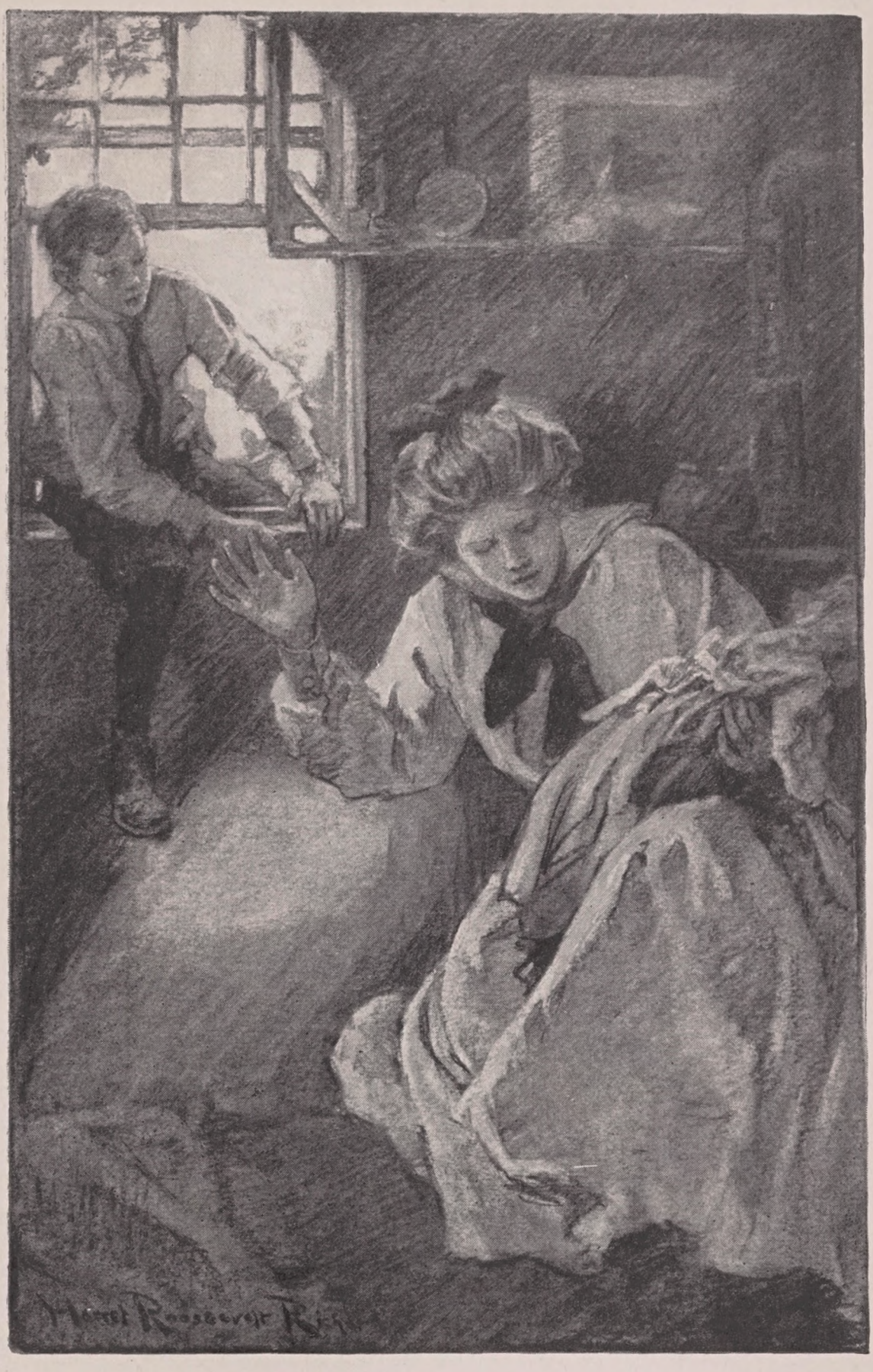
earth had transferred itself to her soft white coat, now damp and sticky from the repeated polishing of Ebenezer's friendly tongue. As result, Pet-Lamb resembled nothing else one half so much as she did a portly mud pie, an animated pie, and long, and tipped with curious appendages at either end; in short, a sort of animated fritter.

Buddie's heart smote him at the sight. Used as Miss Julia had become to Ebenezer's growing love for Pet-Lamb, and to that love's disastrous consequences, an outburst of affection such as this could only end in bathing and combing and hunting out fresh ribbons. Under some conditions, Buddie would not have minded; but he did mind now. He felt that Miss Julia had enough upon her hands in connection with Ethel's entertainment, without the added care of Pet-Lamb's ablutions.

"Ebenezer, come here!" he ordered.

Startled at the peremptory tone, Ebenezer scrambled to his feet, blinking a little, as if in remonstrance at the sudden summons to postpone his rest. Then obediently Ebenezer came; but he brought Pet-Lamb with him, dangling negligently from his mouth and, to all seeming, perfectly content with this unceremonious means of transportation.

As had happened more than once, that summer, in seasons of mental stress and strain, Buddie betook himself to the playhouse in search of Teresa. That was the queer thing about their friendship. When the world went well, they squabbled. When affliction came to either one of them, he sought the other, and was the better for the unfailing sympathy he found. This morning, though, from all appearances, Buddie was not the only one to feel himself in need



Buddie entered by way of the window sill. — *Page 147.*

of sympathy. The playhouse windows stood open to the summer air, and from out them proceeded sounds of discipline.

"You naughty —" *whack!* "naughty —" *whack! whack!!* "girl! You —" *whack!* "bad, bad —" *whack!* "Rosa!"

On the points of his toes, Buddie crept forward to the window. Teresa, her face flushed and her eyes swollen past all beauty, to say the very least, was smiting the luckless Rosa who lay prone across her knee. The total abandonment in the old doll's position appealed to Buddie's chivalry.

"I say, don't!" he protested suddenly, as Teresa, with an unlovely sound, half sniff, half gurgle, raised her arm again. "What are you lamming it out on Rosa like that for?"

"Everything in this whole world," Teresa answered comprehensively, too much absorbed in her own woes to be astonished even at Buddie's summary approach and opposition.

Buddie entered by way of the window sill.

"Everything is nothing," he said, as he dropped down beside her and laid protecting hands upon the aged doll who, it must be confessed, had stood the chastisement extremely well. "Give it a name."

"You'll tell," Teresa asserted fiercely.

Buddie straightened Rosa's crumpled skirt. Then, —

"Did I ever?" he inquired.

"N-no. But you might —"

"So you might break Rosa's neck in one of your tantrums," he retorted just a little mercilessly. "That does n't prove you'll do it now, though."

"How mean you are, Buddie!" But, from the

way Teresa sat up and smoothed her hair, it was plain that the storm was passing.

"No; I don't think I am," he answered slowly. "It's only that it seems to me a little beastly to take it out on a thing that's not to blame, as if I whacked Ebenezer, when Sandy gets to feeling too funny for his manners."

Teresa waived the criticism and caught at the comparison.

"That's what's the matter now," she said.

"Sandy?"

"Yes."

"It generally is," Buddie commented, with sudden moroseness, as there flashed across his mind the memory of his talk with Ethel. Ethel had admired Sandy. Moreover, she had contrived to phrase her admiration in a way that had suggested comparisons with Buddie, comparisons not altogether in Buddie's favour. Not that she had called him Buddie, though. Rather, she had taken pains to address him as Ernest, with a long dwelling on the former syllable.

At the sudden change in Buddie's accent, Teresa looked up suddenly. That way, she knew, lay sympathy.

"Has he to you?" she asked, a little bit unclearly.

However, Buddie understood.

"N–no. That is, not directly."

"It's roundabout things that hurt the most, sometimes," Teresa observed impressively.

Buddie judged it best to change the subject. Teresa, as he had discovered long before, had a tendency to become philosophical, every now and then, and it always left him gasping.

"What has he done to you?" he queried, seeking to turn the talk into more concrete lines.

He succeeded.

"He insulted me!" Teresa burst out hotly. "He never did appreciate me, anyway. I wonder what he'd do, if anything were to take away his sister."

"Steady!" Buddie advised, stroking down Rosa gently, meanwhile, as if she had been Teresa's ruffled feelings.

"Well, I can't be steady," Teresa exploded. "No girl could. It's criticise, criticise, criticise, from morning till night. Nothing I do ever suits him! And now it's all that Ethel. It's Ethel this, and Ethel that, till I'm sick and tired of her very name."

"It's rather sudden; is n't it?" Buddie said thoughtfully.

"Ever since he came home from your house, last night." Teresa spoke as if the experience had been ages on ages long, although, in fact, it was then only an hour past breakfast time.

Buddie chuckled.

"Wonder what he'd have said, if he'd heard her calling him 'that funny little fat one' just now," he remarked.

Teresa was only human. Therefore she brightened at his words.

"Did she, really? And he thinks she's beautiful. He did nothing, all through breakfast, but tell me how she sat up straight, and ate little teenty mouthfuls, and wore her hair braided around her head with a pink ribbon tied around it in a bow on top. Buddie, it's enough to make you crazy," she broke off abruptly.

Again he smoothed out Rosa's wrinkled skirt.

This time, there was intentional meaning in his gesture.

"Apparently," he said then. And then he added, "Don't you care, Teresa. Let them go. If they get on together, it will save us all the trouble of looking out for them, so we ought to be satisfied."

"It's hard to have your own brother prefer another girl to you," Teresa lamented, with a vain attempt to strike again her earlier and more genuine note of tragedy.

Buddie shrugged his shoulders.

"And it's just as hard to have the girl visiting in your own house go gallivanting off with another fellow," he retorted. "However, I suppose, if we try, we can live it down in time. By the way, Teresa, speaking of living it down, does this kitchen happen to support a washboard?"

Other strategists than Buddie have discovered that, in a crisis of nerves and wounded feelings, the bare suggestion of physical toil is often tonic. Teresa forgot her sorrows in her surprise.

"A washboard?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

For his answer, Buddie whistled shrilly. An instant afterward, Ebenezer came trudging in through the open door; and in Ebenezer's mouth was the sodden thing which had originally been the fluffy, white Pet-Lamb, now hastily gathered up from the grass outside the door of the playhouse where the two of them had been napping in the sun.

"Drop it!" said Buddie, and Ebenezer let go the cat, who rolled over on her back and shut two grimy

paws into his whiskers, as if in dumb entreaty not thus to be abandoned.

Buddie spoke again, this time to Teresa.

"That's what for," he said.

Her earlier agonies of the spirit quite forgotten, Teresa was on her feet and alert in a second. The playhouse kitchen did support a washboard, as it seemed; also, which was a good deal more to the purpose, it supported a tub and a towel and a cake of soap.

"We'll want to heat some water, I suppose," Buddie suggested, as Teresa went about her preparation. "Then into the bath she goes, kerplunk!"

And into the bath she did go, struggling a great deal and scratching not a little. However, Buddie was inexorable in his demands for cleanliness, and Teresa's arm, trained in the bedtime ablutions of Horace and little Tootles, was both lusty and cunning. Accordingly, Pet-Lamb was scoured and soaped and scrubbed and rinsed, until once again her fur was white and shining. Then Teresa took up a small blue box.

"What about this?" she inquired.

"What's this?"

"Bluing."

"The cat is n't a shirt," Buddie told her crisply.

"No; but my grandmother has her hair blued, once a month," Teresa assured him, and her tone was lofty.

"Let her go, then," Buddie advised. "Hi! What in thunder are you doing? This is a laundry, not a dyehouse."

For Pet-Lamb, on Teresa's other arm, had taken the wrong instant to try to get away. As result,

she and the box of bluing had landed simultaneously in the tub of water.

"Oh, for the love of —"

"No matter; we'll rinse her off," Teresa interrupted hurriedly. "Oh, catch her, Buddie! Catch her! *Catch* HER!"

But it was too late. An ultramarine Pet-Lamb, dripping from every point of fur, had overturned the tub, had made a dash for the nearest window, and had vanished in the lilac thicket beside the boundary fence.

It was not altogether chance, nor yet was it the resultant action of a guilty conscience which caused Buddie to be extremely late about coming in to luncheon, that same noon. The toilet of Pet-Lamb had been long in the making. By the same token, the toilet of the room had been still longer. Even a small tub of water and a small box of blue can work wonders in the shortest time; and both Buddie and Teresa had been too much absorbed in Pet-Lamb's flight and the subsequent probabilities of her career to take prompt measures to stanch the tide. As result, it had taken many tubs of water and much labour of the elbow muscles to restore the kitchen carpet to a semblance of its normal colour, and to wipe away the azure drops already drying into the paint and furniture. Teresa would have attacked the task alone; but Buddie had been insistent, with the discouraging result that, at the end of all things, Teresa had been forced, in sheer humanity, to heat a fresh supply of water and wash off Buddie, before she dared let him out of the locked door of the playhouse.

"You'd better change your things, before you go

to the table," she advised him maternally, while they both stood on the top step, gasping at the sudden change of air, for, without discussion, they both had deemed it wise to close the windows and draw down the shades, before they set to work, and an eight-foot room grows steamy rapidly.

"All right." Buddie nodded. "I suppose I am a good deal of a spectacle." And he scudded off towards home.

The changing took him a good deal longer than he had anticipated, by reason of the wetness of those things he sought to change. He accomplished it at last, however, by dint of many tugs and thrashings; and, breathless and with the shiny complexion of one who has lately been parboiled, he hurried down to the dining-room. Ethel, dainty and quite unruffled, nodded nonchalantly at him from above her plate of peaches and whipped cream.

"Sorry to be so late, Aunt Julia," Buddie mumbled, as he tossed back at Ethel a casual sort of nod.

Miss Julia smiled, and her smile matched the wee, wee rebuke in her reply.

"I knew it must be something especial, Buddie. Else, you would have been on time, if only out of politeness to Ethel."

"So it was. Very special. Really, I could n't help it," Buddie muttered. Then he fell to at his repast, leaving the burden of conversation on the others.

Miss Julia sought to shift the burden.

"Ethel has been out exploring things with Sandy," she observed.

Buddie attacked his lamb chop as if it had been

an hereditary foe; but his attack was made in utter silence.

Miss Julia spoke again.

"You really took quite a long walk; did n't you, Ethel?"

"Yes, Cousin Julia," Ethel answered.

Miss Julia continued her amiable monologue.

"Buddie is the greatest sort of walker. How far did you go, last Thursday, Buddie?"

Buddie strangled over his peas. Then, —

"Ten miles," he made laconic answer.

"Ten miles. That's too much for us; is n't it, Ethel?"

Ethel smiled into her plate. If this rude boy wanted not to talk, he might gobble as silently as ever he might choose. She would give him a few lessons in the art of keeping still politely.

"Yes, Cousin Julia," she said again.

To his own hidden consternation, Buddie caught himself mockingly echoing her reply into his plate. Really, this was worse than spanking Rosa for the sins of Sandy. Fortunately, however, Miss Julia's attention was upon her guest, worrying a little over that guest's unaccustomed taciturnity.

"You and Sandy went all the way to the shore, then?" she inquired.

Again there came that demurest of all replies.

"Yes, Cousin Julia."

This time, Buddie repressed a furious wish to cast his spoon at Ethel. No mortal, living girl, he told himself, had the slightest right to let herself appear such an unmitigated Poll Parrot.

Miss Julia persevered.

"And you came home through the Hamilton

grounds? You found it very pretty, I know. Did you see the playhouse?"

Buddie raised his eyes furtively, caught Ethel staring straight at him, and dropped his eyes again.

"Yes, Cousin Julia," Ethel answered.

Under the shadow of the table, Buddie sought to tie his legs into a hard knot, by way of alleviating somewhat of his mental agonies. If only that bobolinkum over there would speak out and say just what it was she saw! Then, despite the knowing gleam he had surprised in Ethel's glance, Buddie's puckered brow relaxed, as he recalled the anxious care he had given to drawing down the window shades.

"That playhouse always makes me feel envious," Miss Julia went on bravely. "I always longed for just such a place, when I was a young girl. Teresa has beautiful times there, and I know she'll love to have you run in, as often as you like."

"Thank you, Cousin Julia," Ethel said. And then, lifting her eyes to Buddie, she spoke out, as if in answer to his frantic wishings. "We saw you, as we were going by," she told him quietly. "You don't know how nice and contented you did look, sitting there together, playing dolls."

"I did not! No such a thing!" Buddie asserted swiftly and quite too loudly for perfect manners. However, it should be remembered in his defence that he was taken suddenly, when he was off his guard.

Ethel raised her brows.

"Oh; but we saw you," she assured him lightly. "Sandy was so amused. We stood there, quite a long — "

What would have been the finish of her phrase, or what its vengeance, no one ever knew. Just at that very instant, Lena, serving the table, started until she nearly dropped her tray.

"Landy, Miss Julia!" she exclaimed, in a species of suppressed shout. "Just do be looking at your cat!"

And Miss Julia looked.

Pet-Lamb, dry and warm and hungry after her long nap in the summer sun, had decided it was time for luncheon. Accordingly, after her wonted fashion, she had sought the dining-room, entered it, unseen, and had caught Lena's horrified eye just as she jumped to her accustomed chair. Miss Julia looked and looked again. It was Pet-Lamb; it must be. No other cat was so round and sleek and puffy; no other cat would have known which was the chair where food and drink awaited her capricious appetite. But Pet-Lamb was white. This cat was blue, richly, beautifully blue, blue as the starry part of the flag, blue as the agitated heart of Ernest Angell who watched her appearing, as one watches one's ancestral ghost stalking across an evil dream.

"Ernest!"

That was all; but Buddie departed from the table. As he went, even above the clatter of his upsetting chair, he could hear Ethel's laugh, and her crisp comment, —

"What a childish thing for him to do, Cousin Julia!"

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### DADDY'S LETTERS

AS might have been expected, Buddie hated Ethel with all his might and main throughout the entire afternoon, hated her long after Miss Julia had been to him in his room and listened to all the untoward chain of circumstance which had ended in the dyeing of Pet-Lamb, long after she had absolved him from all blame and made him feel that he was next of kin and the mainstay of the house. Upon the subject of Ethel, Miss Julia was considerately reticent. She began to realize that only time could bring those two potential rivals for her favour into any sort of intimacy. Only time could. The final question, however, resolved itself into whether time would. Miss Julia had her doubts.

Whatever time's intentions regarding the relationship to be between Ethel and Buddie, there was no denying that, as the days ran on, time was working out a curious friendship between Sandy and Miss Julia's dainty, finical young guest. Ponder on the matter as she would, Miss Julia could see no reason in it. She would far sooner have expected Ethel to be chums with the serious-minded Eric; but Ethel caused it to be understood most plainly that she would have none of Eric, that he bored her, that she disliked him only a little less than she disliked Teresa. How far she would have disliked Teresa,

had Buddie liked Teresa less, she did not deign to say. What she did say, was to the effect that Teresa made her nervous, jumping about and flapping back her pigtails from across her shoulders. Teresa had household tasks, too, and that offended Ethel, who wished to find her friends at leisure when she wanted them. And then there was the little Tootles, tearful and toothy, to be considered, little Tootles who every now and then became speckled with the heat. Ethel's girl friends at home, none of them all, possessed such an unlovely appendage as was little Tootles; but Teresa seemed ever to have him in her train.

With Sandy, it was very different. If he had any household tasks at all, he always contrived to shirk them. If the tearful, toothy little Tootles, now presently to be baptised as Toby, felt a yearning for the society of Sandy, Sandy lost no time in discovering that he had an errand at the farthest limits of the town. And Ethel, as a rule, went with him.

Buddie, meanwhile, detested little Tootles upon all accounts, but most especially because he often sought to lift up Ebenezer by his hair. None the less, Buddie concealed his detestation with what grace he could, and endured his presence for the sake of the society of Teresa who, in the intervals of her preparations for the coming fair, seemed to Buddie to spend half her time in ministering to the happiness of little Tootles. Moreover, Ethel professed to disdain the fair, condemning its object as absurd, its methods as old-fashioned. And so the passing of August marked an ever-increasing wideness between the two, Buddie and Ethel Davenport.

Miss Julia, looking on, and mindful of Buddie's

promise to treat the guest as a gentleman and a scout should do, was forced to come to the conclusion that Buddie's notion of a scout's social duty must have been extremely rudimentary. Buddie, the garrulous, had become dumb at meals, glum in the evenings. In Ethel's presence, the cloud rarely lifted from his brow, his eyes were rarely lifted above the level of Ebenezer's backbone, or of his own plate at table. Alone with Miss Julia, he refused to be decoyed into talking over the reasons for his aloofness. He abandoned either the subject, or the room, without the slightest loss of time.

Ethel, meanwhile, sounded upon the subject, sniffed and said she did n't care. She said it, though, with an accent that belied her words; and Miss Julia, with certain anguishing memories of her own girlhood uncomfortably fresh within her mind, forebore to press the matter further.

And then, one day, there came a heavy rain, a hideous, pouring summer rain which kept one housed, whether he would or no. In the middle of the morning, Buddie, with Ebenezer at his heels, strolled out to the verandah to take a look up at the western sky. To his surprise, he found Ethel there before him.

"Hullo!" he said, as in duty bound.

"Hullo!" she answered, for the boredom of the rainy day was causing some relaxation of her vocabulary.

Buddie would fain have passed her by, without another word; but Ebenezer had different notions about courtesy. Accordingly, he marched up to Ethel and laid two sodden fore paws and a wet, wet muzzle into her pink linen lap.

"You dirty dog!"

Buddie made a hasty snatch at Ebenezer.

"Really, Ethel, I am sorry," he said quickly. "I did n't think he'd go to you, or I'd have held him."

Not unnaturally, Ethel resented his suggestion that she would not be attractive, even to a dog.

"Perhaps he knows me better than his master does," she retorted.

If she expected to call forth an amiable protestation, she was disappointed. Buddie merely changed the subject.

"I wonder if it's going to keep on, all day."

"I hope so." Ethel spoke severely. "We need the rain."

"I don't. I've had enough, thank you," Buddie replied. "Come, Ebenezer!" And he turned away, as if to go back inside the house.

Ethel flushed. Whatever her attitude to Buddie, it was annoying to her pride to be left to herself in this summary fashion. She struggled with her dignity for half a minute; then she sought to delay Buddie with a question.

"Has the mail come?"

"Yes."

"Any letters?"

"Mine, from Daddy. That's all."

Ethel fluttered the leaves of the book lying in her lap.

"He is able to write you, then?" she asked, and, moreover, she asked it without a shred of malice.

"Able?" Buddie stared.

"Yes. I did n't know. Mother said, last time she saw him, that he was looking perfectly dreadful," Ethel said, with cheery tact.

Buddie stared again. Then he attacked the question by its smaller end.

"Does your mother know him?" he asked.

"Of course. Everybody knows Doctor Angell," Ethel said generously, for she felt that Buddie deserved at least so much consolation to make up for the uneasiness she saw growing in his eyes.

Buddie ignored the tribute to his father's fame. Instead, —

"Where did she see him?" he demanded.

"In New York."

"When?"

"The day I came up here."

Buddie cast his fear far from him.

"Then it could n't have been my father," he said, with calm finality, and then once more he whistled to Ebenezer, preparatory to reëntering the house.

Ethel's next words stopped him like a pistol shot.

"Oh, yes, it was. I was there, and I heard them talking together, heard what they said."

"And what was that?" Buddie inquired, in a voice he sought to make defiant, although in reality it was only rather faint.

"They talked about Miss Julia, and then mother asked him about you, and he told her you were here to spend the summer."

Buddie stiffened suddenly. Here was a mystery he could not understand. Daddy was in New York, unmistakably in New York; and yet Daddy had told him he was up among the big game in eastern Canada. However, Daddy did not lie. Here was the mystery, and, to Buddie's mind, the mystery held trouble. Nevertheless, Ethel, sitting there so prim and perky and persistent, should get from him

no inkling that there was either trouble or mystery concerning Daddy. To prevent that, —

"I've got to go," he said abruptly. "Is n't that Aunt Julia calling?"

It was not Miss Julia calling, however, but a voice within Buddie himself, calling insistently for explanation, sympathy, for complete confidence. He had a sudden ugly fear that he had been deceived, trapped, treated as a little baby; not by Daddy, though, only by circumstance. If Daddy had been the spokesman of the deceit, then Daddy, of a surety, had been the unwilling tool of that same circumstance. It was more to clear Daddy's shoulders of all blame than it was to learn the truth that Buddie went in search of Miss Julia.

He found her in her morning-room, upstairs. As a rule, Buddie never penetrated to that sanctum, for he realized instinctively that his aunt must have some time and space which should be sacred to herself and to Pet-Lamb, free from the invasions of Ebenezer and himself. This time, however, Buddie violated his self-made rule. He marched upstairs to Miss Julia's morning-room, and Ebenezer, seeing trouble in his master's face, marched up beside him.

"Aunt Julia?" Buddie said, from outside the door.

"Yes, Buddie."

"I want to come in — awfully."

The door swung open.

"Come, then." But, as Miss Julia caught sight of his face, her accent changed. "Buddie child, what is it?" And, without thinking of the possible offence to Buddie's boyish dignity, she held out both her arms.

Neither did Buddie think about his dignity. Instead, he flung himself into her arms and nuzzled his face into the frills of her morning frock.

"Aunt Julia!" The words came with a great, ugly gulp of woe. "I must know what it is about Daddy."

Miss Julia held him close to her, so close, indeed, that by no chance could he see the sudden sweep of colour to her face, the sudden rush of tears into her eyes.

"What about Daddy, dear?" she asked him quietly.

"That's what I don't know. Something's wrong, and I don't know what, nor where he is, nor —" Buddie's head sought to bury itself and its woe under the shelter of Miss Julia's protecting arm; "nor anything at all."

"What is it, Buddie?" she asked again. "Was there something in your letter that you could n't understand about?"

"No; it was n't the letter. It was Ethel. She told me that she and her mother saw him in New York, the day she came up here, and that her mother said that he was looking perfectly dreadful," Buddie quoted. "And Daddy has been telling me that he was in Canada in camp with a man, and growing fat. Daddy would n't lie about a thing like that, Aunt Julia. What does it all mean?" Buddie implored her.

Miss Julia suppressed a momentary longing to deal with Ethel as her trouble-making propensities deserved. Then she gathered up her tact and courage, and sought, instead, to deal out consolation to the stricken Buddie.

"Daddy has n't lied, Buddie," she told him, in the first place. "You can count on that, at any rate."

"Then what is it all so — mixed-up for?" Buddie asked, in a dazed fashion which seemed to Miss Julia to be far more forlorn than many tears. Once on a time, she too had known what it was to lose her moorings, and in a similar way to this.

For a minute, she reflected swiftly. Should she speak out and tell the truth, or not? The mystery, such as it was, had been concocted in mercy to Buddie's peace of mind; but would it not be merciless to prolong the mystery, now that he had found out the fact of its existence? She reflected swiftly; swiftly she came to her decision.

"Come and sit down, Buddie," she bade him then. "No, not there. Come over here on this cushion right beside me, where we can cuddle while we talk."

Buddie did not stop to question what swift inspiration led Miss Julia to the knowledge that there were hours and epochs when even a boy was not ashamed to cuddle. He merely obeyed, and dropped down on the cushion at her feet. Beside him, Ebenezer seated himself, upright and anxious, staring with great gray eyes of pity at his master's tear-stained face. Between dog and dog's master, there was this one difference. The master would not doubt his daddy's honour; the dog could not doubt his master's truth.

"Now, Buddie, listen," Miss Julia said to him, once they were seated. "You can keep on trusting Daddy, for it's all as he has told you. He was in New York, just one day. I knew he was there; but I did n't suppose Ethel would happen to run across him, or I would have warned her."

Buddie raised his head.

"Why?" he asked her, with a simple dignity that sat upon him well, despite his snubby nose and freckled cheeks.

"Wait till we get to that part of it, Buddie, please," Miss Julia bade him gently. "As I am telling you, Daddy was in New York for just one day. The rest of the time, he has been where he has told you, in the Adirondacks and then in Canada. He came down here to New York, though," Miss Julia's voice was very clear and low; "to see a doctor."

"A doctor? Daddy? But he's a doctor, himself," Buddie said dazedly.

"I know, Buddie," Miss Julia assented. "But even a doctor does get ill, sometimes."

"Is Daddy ill?" Buddie asked her steadily.

"Yes, Buddie."

"Is it —" his voice caught; but he pushed it bravely, "dangerous?"

"Not now, Buddie; at least, we hope not. Daddy thinks that perhaps the worst is over."

Miss Julia spoke as cheerily as she was able, so she was surprised to feel Buddie's arm and then his head come down upon her knee, surprised at the note of utter anguish in the boyish voice.

"Perhaps! Oh, Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!"

For a little while, Miss Julia did not speak; not with her tongue, that is. Her stroking hand, however, told Buddie many things.

"He thinks he knows it, dear," she said at last.

"What is it?" Buddie asked her shortly, for he did not trust his voice for any longer question.

"It's his lungs, Buddie. He was afraid — All the doctors were afraid that they were diseased.

There was a fighting chance, they told him, if he would give up his work, and his town home, and go into the woods to live out-doors, night and day. And so he went. It was hard for him, Buddie, hard to go, and harder still to leave you behind."

"Then why did n't he take me with him?" Buddie demanded. "I'd have loved to go, and I could have taken care of him, myself."

Miss Julia's stroking hand drew a bit closer about Buddie's shoulders.

"That was the very thing to be avoided, Buddie, the very reason that, in the end, Daddy was so glad to go. He was afraid that, if you both stayed on together in the city, you would take the trouble from him."

"People don't catch things like that," Buddie assured her stoutly.

"Yes, Buddie; people do. Listen just a little bit longer, and you will see why it is I know. Years ago, when you were a tiny baby boy, your mother had this same trouble, and she died. Daddy had you sent away from home, as soon as the disease began; but, all the time she was so very ill, he took the care of her. He did n't stop to think about the danger to himself, or to you, afterwards, through him. He just remembered that he could take better care of her than anybody else could do, because he was a doctor and her husband. And the doctors say that is the reason he is in such danger now."

Buddie nodded slowly, his eyes heavy, but his face gradually lighting with a new belief.

"Being Daddy," he said at length and tersely; "he could n't have done much else."

He spoke with an absolute unconsciousness of the

light he was throwing upon his own boyish code of honour. It was an instant, though, before his aunt dared trust her voice.

"No," she assented then. "And neither, when he knew the present risk, could he ignore it, and let you share it with him. Instead, he sent you up here to stay with me, and he went into the woods to live until he should get well."

Buddie faced her steadily.

"Aunt Julia, will he get well?" he asked.

"We hope so, Buddie."

"But do you really believe it?" he persisted.

Her eyes drooped before the insistence in his own.

"Buddie, no one can really tell. We can only wait and see."

"How long?"

"Perhaps a year."

"A whole year more without Daddy! And then perhaps —" His head once more went down upon her knee, but only for a minute. "Why did n't he tell me, when he went away?" he asked her.

"He knew it would make you so much more unhappy, Buddie."

"Unhappy!" the boy echoed fiercely. "Did he suppose I'd want to go on being happy, when he was off by himself, missing me, and sick?"

Miss Julia's answer came without delay.

"He did what he thought was best, Buddie. Perhaps he did n't realize how brave you are."

Then her colour came, as she heard his short reply, although, —

"But you realized," was all he said.

More than an hour later, they still sat there together, talking. Their positions were to all intents

and purposes unchanged; but the attitude of Ebenezer, prostrate and snoring on the rug, showed quite plainly that the worst of Buddie's anguish was in the past. Indeed, his face and voice, though grave, were not uncheerful, as he asked his final questions and assented to Miss Julia's answers. In Miss Julia's lap there lay a little heap of letters, all the letters that she had received from Daddy since the trouble came. She had been reading them aloud to Buddie, reading them from end to end without omissions. Indeed, watching the boy above the pages in her hand, she felt assured that Daddy, watching him also, would have approved her course. Buddie was all a boy. Nevertheless, he was taking his trouble like a man.

And Buddie listened intently to the letters, gathering in such comfort as he could out of details of lowering temperature and gaining weight, out of the predictions of the specialists and out of Daddy's own plucky diagnosis of the case. He gained, too, more than a little consolation from his new ability to picture to himself just how, from hour to hour, Daddy was spending his days; from his knowledge, even, that the other man in camp was there to wait on Daddy, not to be a care to him. And so Buddie, plucky and young, listening to the letters and picking up his slender consolations, yet felt his trouble stand off from him a little and give him time and strength to gather up his courage.

"If only, though, I could do something to help him out!" he said at length.

"You can, Buddie," Miss Julia told him.

"What?" Buddie's voice was still a little listless.

"Let him see you're man enough to make the best

of a bad matter. Make him feel you are happy here with me, even if you miss him, every hour. And I want you to keep on missing him, Buddie, just as much as you did at first. It would be dreadful, if you grew used to having him away from you; dreadful if it ever came to where you did n't care. But you can be happy, in spite of it, and have good times here in the country, and let him know you have them. Then he won't worry about you, but be able to save all his strength for his own cure."

Buddie pondered. Then, —

"I see what it is you mean, Aunt Julia," he said slowly. "It's been awful lonesome; but I 'll try."

He rose, as he spoke, and, crossing to the window, stood staring out into the lead-coloured sky. Then suddenly he turned and marched back again, to take his stand beside her.

"Aunt Julia," he said turbulently; "there's one sure thing about it: I'd die of it, if I were anywhere but here with you!" And, to Miss Julia's supreme surprise, his two hands gripped her shoulders fast, as he bent down to give her an explosive, awkward, hearty boyish kiss.

In the years to come, moreover, Miss Julia always felt that that kiss marked one of the two great epochs of her life. A little later on, there was to come the other.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE BOY SCOUTS' RIFLES

AFTER the day and evening of the fair, Teresa went to bed, tired and footsore, but thoroughly convinced that life was worth the living. To be sure, Miss Julia's lawn was tramped into a mosaic of crushed grass and heel-marks, and strewn with scraps of everything from tattered frills to singed rags of paper lanterns, while the garden, now decidedly informal, looked as if an army of locusts had swept over it. Nevertheless, everybody had been at the fair, and everybody had paid toll for the privilege. Teresa went to sleep, clutching the stout old outing-flannel duster into which she had knotted her goodly hoard of shekels, and trying her drowsy best to reckon up their equivalent in miniature rifles, and targets, and such other warlike supplies as she had set her girlish heart upon.

Next day, talking the matter over with the enthusiastic Buddie, she modestly admitted that the fair had been an unqualified success. Strange to say, the glamour had survived the night. Even the next-morning weariness was not enough to make Teresa doubt the value of the undertaking. Her hands shook with excitement, as she untied the knots in the duster and poured the contents of it at Buddie's feet, literally at his feet, as he sat beside her on the back verandah.

"It's all yours, Buddie," she said, and her voice thrilled in her excitement. "It was the only thing we girls could do to help along."

Curiously enough, Buddie delayed a moment, before he stooped to the little heap of silver and of crackling bills, a moment while his hand shut upon that of Teresa, outing-flannel duster and all.

"It was a lot more that you cared about it, Teresa, and believed in it from the very start," he told her.

Teresa was not sentimental. Nevertheless, —

"I did n't. I only believed in you," she made swift assertion.

"Thanks." Loftily as Buddie took the loyalty she offered him, his eyes showed that he was pleased. "Still, it comes to about the same thing in the long run."

"And it will help?" she urged. "Count it, Buddie, do." Again her voice shook with her earnestness.

Buddie bent down to pick up the scattered funds. Then, thinking better of his intention, he slid down to the floor and, gathering the money within the rhomboid of his crossed legs, he fell to counting it aloud. Teresa watched him, breathless with excitement, her eyes dilating as the record mounted. At last, —

"Gee-whittaker!" Buddie said, his eyes like saucers. "Sixty-seven dollars and seventy-nine cents! Three cheers for Teresa Hamilton! I'll call a meeting of the boys, this very day."

Teresa cast down her eyes.

"Then you are glad, Buddie?"

"Glad! I'm ready to jump out of my skin. Daddy has promised — I did n't tell you, for fear it would

make you scare-y — to double anything you did." Buddie chuckled suddenly. "I don't suppose he had the least idea you'd bankrupt him like this; but his word goes, so there we are. We'll have our rifles here by another week, and have a fund left over for the next thing. Teresa, you are a wonder, for sure." And Buddie, his hoard clasped in his hands, sat staring up at her, with honest admiration written large upon his face.

"The girls did most of the work," she suggested generously.

"The girls would n't have done one single, blasted thing, if you had n't started them about it," Buddie contradicted. "They may have done some of the work; but you took up the idea and made all the plans."

Teresa shook her head.

"No," she protested loyally. "When you come to that, Buddie, it really was Miss Julia."

Buddie's face changed, lighted.

"When you come to that, Teresa," he echoed her words; "it generally is Aunt Julia. Without her — "

"Don't think about it, Buddie," Teresa bade him. "We've got her, so there is no use in saying the rest of it."

But Buddie sat silent for a little, his eyes unseeingly upon the little hoard of notes and silver in his hands. It was a fact: Miss Julia was in everything and at the back of everything, nowadays, Miss Julia who had been to him a dreaded stranger, only such a very little while before. And it was as Teresa, in her wisdom, said: no use in thinking what it would be to get on without her, because they simply could not do it. And yet — Buddie glanced up at the

eager, girlish face above him. Without Teresa's energetic help, the fair never would have been. Not all the Aunt Julias in the world could have gathered those girls into the playhouse, every summer afternoon, could have made them listen to the plans, could have kept them busy with needle and paste-tube and shears and raffia, fashioning the pretty trifles that they had sold at such ruinous rates, the day before. Even with Teresa, it was a mystery to Buddie how it had been accomplished. He had not been allowed to be present at those meetings in the playhouse; but some of the girls had brothers, and through them had leaked out the secret that Teresa often and often had been driven to carry things with the highest kind of a hand, or else see her plan fall to bits entirely. However, she had done it, and no lasting enmities had resulted from the doing. Buddie gave her praise accordingly, praise hearty and unstinted.

"And besides all that," he added at length; "you've done another thing that, in the end, may count for a whole lot more. You've started a whole lot of people to talking about the scouts, and asking questions. The more they ask about it and find out, the more they'll like it and like to help it on. However," he added, in swift generosity; "once we are marching through the world and doing things, Teresa, we'll be sure to tell everybody we meet that you were the first one to set us on our feet."

And set them on their feet Teresa had, not alone by equipping them with rifles, but, what was more important, by snatching the popular attention and holding it, for the hour, fixed on the scouts and on those things for which they stood. Without this

little interest at its start, the whole thing might have sprung up and died away, as many and many a boyish fad is bound to do, without one grown-up in an hundred gaining an inkling of the honest, loyal ideal that stood back of it all: the ideal of defending the weak one and of helping on one's neighbour, as well as of keeping one's own life manly and clean and above all suspicion of bullying, or of dishonest dealing with the world.

Even Miss Julia, overseeing the men who were busy cleaning up the lawn, admitted to herself that Teresa's fair had been well worth the while. But Miss Julia, counting up the profits, added yet another one to which Teresa herself was blind. All that scorching month of August, more than a dozen girls had given up all sorts of good times, just for the sake of sitting in the stuffy little playhouse, toiling to raise money for an object in whose advantages they themselves could have no share. Moreover, they had done it gladly, had even sacrificed some of their cherished plans, glowing plans thought out with care, after they had come to a tardy realization that those plans might bring them into passing prominence, but could not fail to be a hindrance to the general good. Miss Julia, thinking of all this, understanding all that it had meant, not only in the ultimate building-up of character, but in the more immediate matters of disappointment and of grimly-grasped generosity, was suddenly overwhelmed with a new idea.

"Wait, James! Never mind rolling the lawn now," she said, as she stepped down from the verandah. "Peter, let the lanterns hang there, and fill up the gaps in the strings. No; not all. Just the double row around the main lawn and the strings that lead down

to the gates. You'll find plenty more lanterns in the box, down cellar." Then she turned again to the astounded James, her face like a girl's in her excitement. "Whistle, please, as hard as you can, James," she bade him; "and then call them, Buddie and Teresa."

And James, once he had recovered from his amazement, did whistle and call with right good will, while Miss Julia followed up the call upon her own account.

"Teresa! Buddie – ee – ee!" she shrilled, and waved her arms in beckoning their invisible selves.

Even upon the Hamiltons' back verandah, they heard her call. Startled, they came running, Teresa in the lead, and Buddie and Ebenezer pounding after. Miss Julia laughed at their distracted faces.

"It's all right, children," she called afar. "I have a new idea; that's all."

Buddie, puffing heavily, dropped down upon the turf before her and wiped his brow with the clenched hand that held the bills.

"Don't do it often, Aunt Julia," he besought her. "I'm winded."

But Teresa jumped to a swift conclusion.

"It's another fair, I know," she said rapturously.

Miss Julia shook her head.

"Nothing one half so improving, Teresa. No; but I think that I shall have a party."

Two voices smote the air.

"Miss Julia, how lovely!"

"Ripping, Aunt Julia! Who?"

"Just us." She smiled at their enthusiasm. "Buddie, if you will get the scouts together, and Teresa will see about the girls, we'll have them all come

here, to-night, and have a little dance out on the lawn."

"Bully!" And Buddie rendered his aunt breathless and speechless, by the way he cast himself upon her.

Teresa, unable to get within reach, took it out in chiding Buddie.

"Do be careful. You're ruining her clothes and pulling down her hair, Buddie. Careful! Oh, call off that dog!" For Ebenezer saw no reason against his joining in the demonstration.

Laughing and dishevelled, Miss Julia came out from their combined embraces and took up her theme, without a glance down at her demolished frock.

"It's all right, Teresa. Soap is cheap, and hot irons ought to be plenty in such weather as this," she said. "But, to return to our party, I've told the men to put back the lanterns on this lawn. If you children can hunt up the guests, and then pick up the worst of the rubbish in the house, I'll get ready to go in town to see what I can find for us to eat. Teresa, under all the circumstances, do you suppose your father would come over here to help us out?"

Under all the circumstances, Teresa did suppose he would, and Mr. Hamilton bore out the supposition. As he was an expert rag-time musician, his help took a most practical turn, when it came to the time for dancing. Moreover, Buddie, acting on his own initiative, had asked the retired West Pointer, the commandant of their prospective rifle corps, and, as it proved, the retired West Pointer owned a violin and loved to play for dancing. That settled the question of the orchestra; and Miss Julia's check

book and her coaxing smiles settled the even more important question concerning the things that they should eat. Miss Julia's party, like Teresa's fair, seemed destined to be a rousing success.

"The boys and the fiddle and the eats are all most gloriously looked out for," Buddie observed, as, weary, but smiling, he came to show his best clothes off to Miss Julia in her morning-room. "There's only one thing now that feezes me."

"How fine you look, Buddie!" she told him.

"Ditto," he answered, as his boyish glance swept over her. "I speak for the first dance with you, Aunt Julia."

She flushed like a girl, at his words.

"Thank you, Buddie! I wish I could have it; but I must stand back, for the first one, and let you do your duty by somebody from outside the house."

His eyes twinkled.

"Then go outside, yourself, and come in at the gate, if you're so particular."

"No use, Buddie. We'll dance together afterwards; but this is our party, and we must entertain our guests, not just enjoy each other," she said, with smiling gravity.

But Buddie shook his head, and proceeded to lay down the law.

"A fellow ought to be allowed to dance with his best girl, whenever he can get the chance," he grumbled.

Miss Julia shook her head back at him.

"Buddie, what language!" she protested. And then she added, in belated question, "What's the fly in your amber, Buddie?"

"The?"

"The thing that worries you."

"Oh, that! It's that Ethel," he said, and his young voice hardened on its new note of boyish disdain.

Miss Julia crossed the room to close the door. Then, —

"What about Ethel, Buddie?" she asked, as she faced back again.

"Nothing; only I do wish I could be sure she would n't stand back and criticise every single thing we do," Buddie said, a little bit resentfully.

"You can," Miss Julia told him quietly.

"How, then?"

"By keeping her so very busy, having a good time, that she won't get any chance to criticise."

"Whew–w–w!" Buddie whistled. "That's a pretty stiff proposition, Aunt Julia."

"Not a bit."

Buddie plumped himself down on the couch, plumped his elbows down on his knees, plumped his chin down on his fists and stared at his aunt unwinkingly.

"How would you go about it, yourself?" he demanded.

Miss Julia laughed, and the laugh, as it seemed to Buddie, took dozens of years from her apparent age.

"I'm only an elderly relation, Buddie; not a boy that dances," she suggested.

"Much she'd dance with me!" Buddie retorted. "She told Sandy that she'd sooner waltz with a whale; Teresa heard her, and so did I."

Miss Julia's next question showed that she had not yet forgotten what it was to be a girl among other girls.

"Had you asked her, Buddie?" she inquired.

"Not on your life. Bet you, I was glad I had n't."

"S. L. A. N. G.," Miss Julia spelled, and Buddie had the grace to blush. Then she went on, "Try it, to-night, and see."

"And get — er — rejected for my pains?" Buddie demanded, making the substitution just in time.

"You won't. Try it and see," Miss Julia repeated. Then she dropped down at Buddie's side upon the couch. "Buddie," she said; "all in our best bibs and tuckers like this, and waiting for our party to come, it is n't just the best time for 'fidy stories,' as I used to call them. And yet, I'm going to do it, for just one little minute. Do you know, Buddie, this is the very nicest summer I have ever spent? Perhaps, if you try hard, you can guess out the reason. The house used to be so prim and lonely; and now — it is n't. But there has been just one horrid little cloud on this last month, Buddie."

Buddie was too honest to dodge his share in the accountability.

"Ethel and me," he admitted bravely.

"Yes, dear; just that. You have n't exactly quarrelled, nor been rude; but you have n't pulled together and you have gone your ways. It was n't the fault of either one of you alone. You both of you have been stiff and critical; but —"

"Well?" Buddie queried, his eyes upon the tips of her shining satin slippers.

"But, Buddie, I rather think that you will have to be the one to set it right."

"I won't," Buddie assured her mutinously. And then he added, "Why?"

"Because you happen to be the boy, not the girl.

Because she is a guest, and you belong here," Miss Julia told him artfully.

"I'll be hanged if —" Then Buddie shut his teeth. "What do you want me to do about it, Aunt Julia?"

Miss Julia smiled, sure that her point was gained.

"Dance with her, to-night, just as often as you can, Buddie; as often, that is, as you can without being neglectful of any of the others. See to it that she gets acquainted with the nicest boys, instead of standing about, all the time, with Sandy, the way she did, last night. Besides," Miss Julia rose, as she spoke, and slowly took one bud out of the bunch of blossoms she was wearing at her belt; "besides, you know, Buddie, you are the one person in the world who can make Ethel and Teresa friends," she added, as, bending down, she pinned the bud into his buttonhole. "Now go along, my fellow host," she ordered him. "You're fine as a fiddle, and it is high time we both were downstairs, ready to shake hands with our guests."

Obediently enough, Buddie went his way, leaving Miss Julia to an instant of uneasy wondering whether or not she had chosen the wrong moment for her lecture. A word spoken out of season, she remembered from her own young days, could do an unending amount of harm; and a boy like Buddie, she was well aware, had a lasting antipathy to too insistent and persistent admonition. Miss Julia's face, looking back at her from her mirror, had an anxious pucker of the brow, an uneasy gleam in the pale brown eyes. Then the brow straightened suddenly, and the brown eyes cleared. Buddie's voice came ringing back to her from the hall outside.

"Hi! Ethel! Ethel Davenport!" he was bawling, at the very top of his lungs. "Stop your prinking, and come along downstairs. I 've got a new pinky-purple necktie for Ebenezer, and I 'm waiting to get you to put it on."

Miss Julia smiled. Then she held her breath in sudden fear. Good old Buddie! He was reliable as any clock; but girls were such unaccountable things. However, —

"All right," Ethel's voice came down from her room; and Miss Julia, hearing, wondered no less at the accent than at the unceremonious phrasing; "I 'll be down in a jiffy, Buddie. Just wait till I —" And a whacking in and out of bureau drawers drowned the remaining syllables.

Three days later, Ethel took her departure. Buddie, sincerely doleful on his own account, escorted her to the station and insisted upon carrying her smaller luggage. What was more, he also insisted on it that Teresa should escort her, too. Afterwards, walking home together, as a matter of course the two friends discussed the departed guest.

"Really, after you get used to her flummeries and frills, she is n't so very bad," Teresa observed temperately, when the last trace of the smoke-banner had vanished from the distant horizon.

Buddie lost no time in filing a remonstrance.

"Not fair, Teresa! She's a good deal more than that."

"How long since?" Teresa asked him mockingly.

Buddie, however, was not to be deterred from speaking out his own opinion, even though it had been somewhat tardy in the making.

"Ever since I took the trouble to find out," he

retorted coolly. "No use, Teresa; we may as well give in and own up that we've been a pair of dunces."

"Speak for yourself, if you please," Teresa bade him rather hotly.

Buddie's good temper remained quite unimpaired.

"So I will, and for you, too. We neither of us had the sense to discover that, under her frosting, Ethel Davenport was the best sort of cake. Sandy was the only one of all of us who knew enough to find out for himself. I would n't have known it, even now, if it had n't been for Aunt Julia; and neither would you. Besides," with a sudden turn, Buddie rushed the war across the borders and into Teresa's camp; "if you did n't like her, yourself, what did you give that dinner party for, yesterday, out in the playhouse?"

"Out of manners to Miss Julia," Teresa made demure reply.

"Manners a lot! You did it because you liked Ethel; or else you were a worse hypocrite than I ever took you for," Buddie told her flatly. "What 's got into you, Teresa? It is n't like you to dodge like this. Own up, and say you think she is worth the knowing."

Teresa struggled with a nasty little wave of rising jealousy, downed it, and faced Buddie with a laugh.

"What if I do?" she asked him. "That's not what's worrying me, though. I'm only afraid you'll end by liking her better —"

"Than I do you? Not much," Buddie reassured her. "I tell you things, you know." And then he added, as if by an afterthought, "Next year, though, I mean to see if we all can't get a little bit more fun out of her being here. She is n't you, Teresa, and

she won't be; but, after all, she makes another one, even if it is of a different kind."

But Teresa was deaf to his words. Instead, —

"Next year?" she echoed, with sudden gravity. "How do you know you'll be here, yourself, another year?"

Buddie's face fell, and his unfailing fund of slang and jollity forsook him.

"I never thought of that," he answered blankly.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### BUDDIE'S FIRST NOVEL

CURIOUSLY enough, in answering Teresa as he did, Buddie had spoken the flat, literal truth. In making his boyish plans, that summer, it never once had occurred to him that the following summer might not find him there.

No lack of loyalty to absent, invalided Daddy had entered into this, however. Buddie lay awake many a night, building bright plans of the things that the two of them would some day do together, for, since that stupefying minute when at first the fear of the Unknown had swept upon him, Buddie had clung fast to every hope that offered. His mind simply refused to grasp the idea that Daddy could be permanently taken out of his life; Daddy's coming back again was merely a matter of time, and that not too long an one. Accordingly, Buddie made his plans, and then counted the hours till their fulfilment. However, in all these plans, Miss Julia had an active part. Unthinkable to Buddie that, this precious, priceless relative once discovered, he ever could get along again without her. Rather than that, by some intricate arrangement which Buddie never stopped to fathom, Daddy and he and Ebenezer would live out the remainder of their lives beneath Miss Julia's roof. She and Daddy were half-brothers; at least, Daddy was her half-sister —

And, at this point in his planning, Buddie, as a rule, went off to sleep.

Ebenezer, likewise, appeared to have taken the firmest sort of foothold in Miss Julia's home. More than that, he also appeared to have taken the burden of its protection upon his shaggy shoulders. The path to the front door he seemingly regarded as being safe from all invasion; but the path to the back steps, the path trodden by errand boys and by delivery people and by agents, this path Ebenezer had assumed as his own especial charge. The people who trod that path he inspected carefully, sorting them out by some process known only to his canine brain. The delivery people, especially the ones who brought the meat, he welcomed with embracing paws. The errand boys he followed closely, his blunt nose pressed to their brief coat-tails, and his ears alert, his eyes eager to detect any sign of their stepping from the path of immediate duty. The agents, however, Ebenezer never followed. Rather, he led the way; but, as he led it, backing step by step and baying in deep-mouthed defiance, the process could scarcely be construed as a welcome, even by the most optimistic peddler of his class.

All this was by day. By night, Ebenezer simplified the process to its lowest terms. He allowed no one whatsoever to come inside the grounds, without making the welkin ring with his objections. Worst of all, Ebenezer was the lightest sort of a sleeper; and, as the weeks ran on, he took the whole street under his protection, and gave voice to his audible resentment against any of the neighbours who stayed out late, or had belated callers. Surely, Ebenezer

was doing his lusty best to earn his salt at Miss Julia's table.

Miss Julia herself Ebenezer appeared to regard as an object for his veneration. Buddie was always first and foremost; but when, for one reason or another, Buddie was out of Ebenezer's reach, then Ebenezer attached himself to Miss Julia's side, and stolidly refused to budge, no matter what rival attractions offered. And Miss Julia's heart was by no means proof against the loyal devotion of the great, gray dog, who muddied her frocks and tore her frills with his flapping embraces, who dragged and pawed and mouthed her best rugs into untidy wads close at her side, and then lay down upon them with his whiskers across her slippers and his gray eyes turned up to her in voiceless adoration, who insisted that their family group was incomplete without the presence of Pet-Lamb, and who hunted up Pet-Lamb and brought her, fresh from her bath, dragging limply along the floor or the garden walks, to lay her in Miss Julia's lap, with a contented sigh. There were certain disadvantages concerning Ebenezer; but, to Miss Julia's mind, they were one and all outweighed by his devotion.

Ebenezer's devotion was more showy, perhaps, than that of Buddie; but, in all surety, it was no more deep and strong. Up to now, Buddie had never known much about women. He had supposed rather vaguely that they were merely an embodied "Don't!" Instead, he had learned to know Miss Julia. Totally unaware, moreover, that Miss Julia herself had been changing fast, during those summer weeks in the society of himself and Ebenezer, Buddie merely wondered why it was that, as he phrased it, he never

had guessed what there was in her, until he had come to know her. It would have been utterly astounding to Buddie, if he had known that he, his irresponsible boy self, had been putting new things inside Miss Julia, through all that spring and summer: new understandings, new appreciations and, above all else, new desires.

In one respect, Buddie was a true man. He swiftly had assumed it as his right and care and joy to look out for Miss Julia. He protected her as sternly as did Ebenezer, and with infinitely less fuss. He delighted in fagging for her, in doing her small errands. Most of all, he rejoiced in finding out her petty wishes and in anticipating them to the best of his ability. To be sure, he found it more ennobling to walk in town and back again to get her a box of chocolates than it was to black his shoes. He vastly preferred the construction of a rustic verandah footstool that tumbled over, every time one touched it, to the more prosaic occupation of brushing the dried-up mire out of Ebenezer's frilly thighs. However, Buddie reasoned, the footstool would stay made and, upon no conditions, would Ebenezer's thighs stay clean. He chose to put in his toil upon more permanent achievement. It was his pleasure to lay the fruits of his adoration at Miss Julia's feet; but it was the privilege of his masculine logic to decide what form those fruits should take.

It was towards the end of August that Buddie read his first grown-up novel. Lena had lent it to him, to solace the pangs of an all-day pouring rain. It was a very romantic novel, with a stern duke, and a poor musician who had long hair and aristocratic hands and a family pedigree sewn up in a wallet

which he hung about his neck, and the duke's sister, who was dying of an incurable disease that no doctor could equip with a proper label. In the end, of course, it all came right; and the duke's sister danced all the others into their chairs at her own marriage ball. Buddie devoured the novel greedily. He liked it from the start, because they all had such good things to eat, and because the poor musician shot five plover, which Buddie from the context took to be some sort of a mushroom, in the air, without pausing to reload, and all with a single-barreled gun. This, of course, was immediately after Teresa's fair and before the consequent coming of the rifles; and, at that epoch, marksmanship seemed to Buddie to outrank mere probabilities. Later, as the novel progressed, he tried his level best to identify Teresa with the heroine, but that was beyond even Buddie's powers. Teresa was too fat; moreover, no heroine could be imagined with a little Tootles in her train, or even sweeping up the playhouse kitchen floor, after one of her Saturday repasts. Clearly, Teresa would not do.

However, there must be a human peg in the background, a peg on which to hang the most romantic of the book's adventures. Dismissing Teresa, Buddie cast about in his own mind, and chanced upon Miss Julia. She was the very one, except a little bit too old. People of thirty-one could never have romances. Still, he could put it back a little bit into the edge of the past. Perhaps Aunt Julia might have had a romance once. Of course she had. Did n't Teresa say so, and tell him all about it, weeks before? It was a perfect romance, too, perfect and unfinished, perfect because it was unfinished. To be sure, though,

an insurance man was n't like a musician; and Buddie even had his doubts about the wallet. It would be nice, of course; only it would make one's shirt so very humpy. But, otherwise, the romances were much alike. He read on greedily till time for luncheon; and, all the time he read, one corner of his mind was busy fitting Miss Julia and the insurance man into their proper niches in the pathetic tale. The pathos was at its highest tide, when Buddie was called in to lunch.

Throughout the meal, Miss Julia missed his wonted chatter. Instead, Buddie absorbed his chicken salad and his fried potatoes dreamily, as if he did not taste them; and, from above his cup of steaming chocolate, he gazed across at Miss Julia with sad and contemplative eyes, as if in wonderment that she could find an appetite in such a crisis. At last, his silence and his melancholy stare came on Miss Julia's nerves. Was the boy ill or homesick, this rainy day; or was there something in her own appearance to bring about this melancholic scrutiny? Accordingly, —

"What is it, Buddie?" she asked him, as the silent meal drew towards its ending.

Buddie started as suddenly as if one of the characters in the book had walked into the room to put the question.

"Oh, nothing," he evaded. "Why?"

"I thought you looked —" Miss Julia ransacked her mind for the proper word; "worried."

"No," Buddie told her heavily. "I was only wondering."

"Wondering what, Buddie?"

His answer took her breath away completely.

"Wondering whether lowly birth should be a barrier to love," he announced.

"What!" Miss Julia's eyes and accent both implied her alarm lest Buddie's brain suddenly had become affected.

Buddie condescended to explain himself in terms culled from his every-day vocabulary.

"I was wondering, if a fellow loved a mick; that is, if a girl loved him, whether she ought to marry him, even if he did n't have a penny to his name."

It was one of Miss Julia's charms for Buddie that she never stopped to question the sources of his interest in any subject, but flung herself into its discussion without delay. She did it now.

"It might depend a little upon how much she loved him, Buddie."

"I mean," Buddie made further explanation; "if she loved him till the heart within her turned to water in his presence."

This time, Miss Julia felt it was her duty to protest.

"But, Buddie, people's hearts don't act like that," she said.

"Oh, yes; they do. I read it in a book," Buddie assured her promptly.

"A medical treatise?" Miss Julia queried irrepressibly.

Buddie shook his head at her frivolity.

"Of course not; I 'm not Daddy," he told her, a little impatiently. "It was in a novel; but people who write novels have to know all the things they write about, doctor things and all. I've heard Daddy say so, lots of times, and he used to roar over the mistakes they made. And this one's knees failed her beneath his questioning glance. Aunt Julia,"

contrary to all his teaching, Buddie plumped his elbows on the table, as he put the question; "did you ever feel your knees go like that?"

Miss Julia flushed a little. Faint as it was, though, Buddie saw the flush and resolved to hark back to it again, a little later on, if he had the chance.

"No, Buddie. They never did."

Buddie compressed his lips. Then he put another question, a leading one, it seemed to him.

"Have you a woman's heart, Aunt Julia?" he demanded.

Miss Julia gave her whole attention to the sugaring of her blackberries. At last, —

"I certainly hope so," she said gravely.

"She had," Buddie made incomprehensible reply. "I thought perhaps that was the reason it acted up so, for mine does n't; but you say yours — No; it was your knees. But, Aunt Julia, don't you really think, if she felt that way in her knees and things, she ought to marry him?"

Miss Julia still clung fast to her gravity.

"It might depend a little bit on him, Buddie."

"Oh, he loved her, for a fact, and he used to sit up, all night, and think about her."

"Very foolish of him," Miss Julia offered comment. "He'd much better have stood up, all day, and worked for her."

"So he did, and his eyes grew hollow; but it was n't of any use at all, she was so hard of heart," Buddie argued for his hero. "He could hit the bull's eye, nine times out of ten, too."

Miss Julia allowed herself to relax and laugh a little.

"And even that did n't affect her watery heart,

Buddie?" she inquired, with what seemed to Buddie a most unsympathetic sort of cheeriness.

"Not a stiver. You see, she was of the bluest kind of blood, and beautiful, and kept a pair of spanking bays. He was poor as poverty and lowly of birth. He had n't a thing in the world but his talents and his ten fingers and the wallet that held his pedigree," Buddie told her eagerly.

In spite of the fact that people of lowly birth do not, as a rule, carry their pedigrees upon their persons, Miss Julia began to look more interested.

"How did they ever happen to meet, Buddie?" she inquired, not too unnaturally.

"She was out driving in the wood, and her horses ran away. At every plunge, they just did n't tip the carriage over and tilt her out; but she managed to hold on, even after they had pitched the driver head over heels. And her face was ashy white; but no cry came from those brave lips. And then, all of a sudden, he came in sight. He was a wonderful shot, and he had just been out hunting, so he had his gun with him. As soon as he saw the maddened horses bearing down upon him," Miss Julia was having all she could do now to sort out the story and translate it out of Buddie's vernacular into book language and back again; "he up with his gun and, without more than a jiffy to take aim, he shot the harness off the horses, strap by strap, until the last one fell away." Buddie swept on rapidly, too intent, now, upon his story to heed the fact that his hearer might know some measure of uncertainty as to which one fell away: the last horse, or the final strap. "And then," he went on, still ambiguously; "loosened by the shots, they dashed away, unguided, and

the rocking, plunging carriage came to a sudden halt."

"Really?"

"Yes," Buddie passed his plate for more berries. "Is n't that a thriller, though?"

"I should say it was. What is it?"

"*The Low-Born Lover.*"

"What!" Miss Julia's accent was indescribable.

"Yes. It's splendid," Buddie told her.

"I should judge so." And Buddie's quick ear caught a faint note of sarcasm.

"Really, it is, Aunt Julia; and it's very instructive too. It tells all about violins, and kitchen gardens, and the way to serve your table, when the king is coming in to dinner with you."

"Where did you get this — this book, Buddie?" Miss Julia asked, as temperately as she was able.

"Lena let me take it."

"Lena?" Miss Julia silently registered her full intention to have it out with Lena, later on.

"Yes. I had n't anything to do, this morning; and it was too wet to go out and have any fun, and so she lent me the book. It's a good book, too. It's set me thinking about lots of things."

"Evidently." Try as she would, Miss Julia could not keep her voice from sounding rather dry.

But Buddie was once more mounted on his former theme, and paid no attention to her dryness.

"Aunt Julia, tell me truthfully," he persisted; "after all that, don't you really think it was her duty to marry him?"

Miss Julia resigned herself to the inevitable discussion, totally unaware, however, whither that discussion was destined to lead.

"Not unless she loved him, Buddie."

"But she did love him, I keep telling you. She loved him with all her heart, loved him just as much as I love Ebenezer. And he loved her."

"Then what was the matter?"

"That he was n't of her set. He was poor, and wore horrid clothes, and did n't ask the king to dinner, and, if he had, he would n't have come. But I don't see that all that ought to make the difference. A noble heart can beat in even the breast of a lowly-born insurance man," Buddie argued glibly.

Miss Julia whitened to the lips. Then she turned to a dark, dark red. She cast a strange sort of a glance on Buddie, half angry, half afraid, and wholly anxious, as if dreading the thing that, in all probability, he would say next.

However, Buddie rushed on with his argument, totally unaware of his unconscious slip of the tongue.

"She loved him, and he loved her. He was a gentleman, away down inside all his shabbiness; he knew the right sort of things to do, and the right way to do them. And she had money enough for both of them, and she did love him awfully. That's why I think she was a horrid snob not to marry him; don't you?"

"Did n't she marry him?" Miss Julia asked a little faintly.

"She has n't yet. Of course, I don't know what will come at the end. Now she has told him nay, and he has swallowed his sorrow," Buddie spoke as if it had been a capsule; "and gone away to the outer world to work and wait and suffer. Really, you can't help feeling sorry for him; but I think he acted a good deal like an ass to go away."

"Buddie!" Miss Julia's accent of rebuke was, perhaps, the sharper because she had been taking a curiously personal interest in the fate of the hero, and so resented Buddie's condemnation all the more.

"Well, he did," Buddie insisted rather mutinously.

Miss Julia appeared to be following out a train of thought that was all her own. At last, she came back to the realization of Buddie's presence at her side.

"What ought he to have done, Buddie?" she questioned, and an older listener than Buddie would have wondered at the slight catch in her voice, as she put the question.

Buddie's reply came so promptly as to dismiss all doubts as to how he himself would have met the same emergency.

"He ought to have grabbed her in his arms and lugged her off to the nearest rector he could find," he answered, and once again Miss Julia's colour came. "At least," he amended hastily; "that's what I think about it, Aunt Julia. Of course, though, you ought to be a better judge than I."

"Why, Buddie?" Miss Julia's voice was scarcely audible.

Like the gunshots of his hero, Buddie's answer, albeit unconsciously, struck full on the bull's-eye of the situation.

"Because, Aunt Julia, you ought to know just how the woman feels about it." And then, all of a sudden, he awakened to a belated realization of the fitness of his words. "Jiminy cricks, Aunt Julia!" he burst out penitently; "I didn't think at all. Honest and true, I really never meant to twit on facts."

# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

## THE REGATTA

THE fair over, Ethel gone and summer going fast, Buddie was making up his mind to go back to school once more, making it up with a reluctance born of the happiest summer he had ever spent. True, there was the lack of Daddy; but the past ten days had brought the grand news that Daddy was really and truly gaining. And, atoning in some measure for Daddy's absence, there had been Miss Julia, and Teresa, and the captaincy of the scouts, besides the real country where there were things to do, the country where one lived and learned the possibilities of every by-path in the region, not went to on a journey for a more or less short vacation which always ended just as one grew used to it and cared to stay. This was all quite different.

It had been a wonderful summer, Buddie admitted gloomily, now that it was almost gone. Anyway, he had made the very most of it; of so much he was sure. With that belief held fast in his mind, he faced the opening of school with so much better grace. At least, he would be spared the regret of knowing he had failed to make the most of his vacation. But now school loomed close at hand, school where one must sit in a row and learn things and keep very still. Worst of all, school stretched away indefinitely before him; it would be years and weeks till Christ-

mas came and brought a cessation of the dull routine. However, there was no avoiding it. One must face the music like a man. Buddie shut his teeth, and swallowed his own repinings as well as he was able.

And then, all at once and at the very last minute, a wonderful thing happened. No one really seemed to know just what sort of a thing it was; but it delayed the opening of school for two whole weeks, while a small army of carpenters was set to work with feverish haste to put the thing, whatever it might be, to rights. Buddie could hardly believe his ears, when Sandy came rushing in, one morning, to tell him the good news.

Sandy departed to tell the news to some more people and so to spread the general rejoicing. Buddie went to find Miss Julia. To his extreme surprise, she received the tidings with almost as much pleasure as he himself had done, and said never a word of the loss to his education and his manhood caused by the two extra weeks of his vacation.

Instead, she merely laughed a little, after the irresponsible fashion which had been growing on her of late.

"How very nice!" she said. "Really, Buddie, I could n't have planned it any better, myself. What if we make the most of our chance, and run off somewhere for a little change? I was just planning for it, earlier, when Teresa started on her fair, and I did n't quite like to go off and leave her to put it through alone. Then Ethel stayed a little longer than I had expected, and I could n't see my way to get it in. Now I 'll telegraph for rooms, and we 'll be off, tomorrow night."

And Buddie stood and listened to her swift out-

lining of her plan's details. When she had finished, it seemed to him that one word only could be found to fit the situation.

"Bully!" he said, and Miss Julia, looking into his radiant face, forebore to criticise.

"And one more thing, Buddie." As she spoke, Miss Julia bent forward, her hands clasped on her knee, her eyes upon his face. "What do you think of our taking Teresa with us? She would n't be much in the way; would she? And I really think she needs a rest from little Tootles."

"In the way? Aunt Julia!" And then the power of speech left Buddie utterly.

Miss Julia had no trouble in interpreting his silence. Moreover, to judge from the quality of her smile, she found it satisfactory. Accordingly, —

"Then will you go and hunt her up, Buddie, and bring her over here? You need n't tell her why I want her, though. I 'll be telephoning to people: the telegraph office and the tickets and the luggage and all that, while you are gone." And she took the receiver from the stand, close at her elbow.

Miss Julia had had long experience in planning journeys; but never before had her plans worked out to so speedy and successful a finish. This was at noon on Thursday. At dawn on Saturday morning, three people, one of them as sleepy as the other two were lively, were landed from their Pullman on the platform of a tiny station in the northern hills. Beside them was a huge and frowsy dog who had objected to being left at home even more strenuously than he had objected to his night in the clanging, rocking baggage car, tied up among the trunks and with a pink pasteboard tag hung on his collar. It

had been a long and anxious night to Ebenezer, although Buddie had visited him from time to time, and assured him that everything was quite all right. In spite of Buddie's assurances, though, Ebenezer had his doubts, many doubts and serious. Strange men kept coming into his new kennel, and saying things, and sticking curious fingers into his back hair. Ebenezer showed his teeth; but he forebore to growl, less, however, from manners than from canine intuition that mere growls would be inaudible in such clattery surroundings.

Breakfast, that morning, seemed to them all unending: to Miss Julia because it delayed by just so much the sound, sound nap for which her very soul was longing; to Buddie and Teresa because they were in a hurry to go outside and explore things. Only Ebenezer ate with stolid unconcern. Neither curiosity nor exceeding sleepiness could put a brake on Ebenezer's appetite, once it went into action. He merely took in food, until his frowsy legs could no longer bear the burden. Then, when at last they collapsed beneath it, he curled himself up, just where he lay, and calmly slept it off.

A week afterward, Buddie and Teresa, fat as cubs and brown as berries, would have affirmed to the ears of all men that they had found a veritable paradise. The place itself counted for much: half hotel, half camp as it was, pitched upon the very borders of a long, narrow lake that wound in and out between its mountain walls. The walls were steep and wooded and just now splashed here and there with the yellow of birch, the scarlet of the maple, for autumn came on early in those northern woods.

So late in the season as it was, the summer colony

had dwindled to its lowest terms; but, as is often the rule, it was the nicest people who stayed on till the very end. To all appearing, Miss Julia knew them all. Everybody stopped beside her table, that first morning. In fact, Buddie and Teresa found their greetings a sad interruption to the process of satisfying their own lusty appetites.

Besides the grown-up people, a round dozen of youngsters filed into the dining-room. Buddie's eye, trained to the distinctions of the city, discovered that they were from the private schools which open late. Reasoning swiftly and shrewdly, he passed on to the belief that they would be good all-round athletes, and so, in a place like that, the better worth the knowing. The event justified his belief. By noon, he was outclassed on the tennis court; by dinner time, he and Teresa, totally unaccustomed to fresh-water rowing, had been left behind at the finish of an impromptu regatta.

That night, when Buddie and Teresa had gone to the small log cabin where they were to have their rooms, with Miss Julia to chaperon and Ebenezer to protect them all, the other youngsters, gathered in the dining-room, talked the new arrivals over. Their verdict was unanimous and favourable. The new-comers not only did things well enough to be worth while; but they took defeat pluckily and without seeking to make excuse. Teresa handled her oars like a boy, and yet she did her hair and managed her skirts like the nice girl she so plainly was. As for Buddie, there was one phrase upon the tongues of all. He was all right. The lagging interest in the season's sports showed signs of quickening. Two days later on, it was once more at fever heat.

By degrees, however, as the days went on, the interest centred itself almost entirely on the rowing. The place accounted a good deal for this, for it was ideal for the sport. The lake was a long, winding stretch of water, free from rocks and shoals save at one spot, half-way up its length, where a narrow line of ragged boulders stretched out from either shore until they almost met across the narrow channel. Moreover, shut in as it was by mountains, upon nine days out of every ten, the lake was as smooth and quiet as the Frog Pond on Boston Common. The level ground along the shore was entirely too narrow to admit of many land sports. In fact, the little plateau that held the cabins and the tennis courts was almost the only break in the whole great circling slope which stretched from the summits of the mountains down to the narrow rocky belt that girdled the water's edge. On this account, the summer colony was practically driven to the lake for all their out-door amusements, and rowing flourished, to the neglect of other sports.

The social stir which followed upon the discovery that both Buddie and Teresa could row more than a little, sent the fleet of boats out upon the lake once more. Every day, and then all day long, the youngsters were out upon the water, now racing to and fro, now drifting idly in the sunshine, now in pairs, or each one by himself, now huddling together in a cluster of green boats and pale-brown and flashing oars. It was all great fun, purposeless, irresponsible, idle fun.

And then, all at once, somebody, some of the men who sat about on the verandah and waited for a chance to talk to Miss Julia, offered a cup for one final regatta of the season. An hour after the offer

was announced, the entire camp was buzzing with the plans. To be sure, the contestants must be under sixteen years old; but that fact did not affect the general excitement in the very least. Everybody who was not under sixteen, was a mother, or a sister, or a grown-up cousin of somebody else who was; and the grown-ups took the situation a good deal more seriously than did the contestants themselves.

The remaining rules were simple. Any number of boats could enter for the contest. Each boat must be rowed by two people, a boy and a girl. Each one must pull two oars. They could pair off in any way they chose. The course, though, was a long one; it stretched almost the whole distance from one end of the lake to the other, and the finish should be just opposite the broad verandah of the great log cabin where they all had to gather for their meals.

Then it was that, for the first time in her life, Teresa learned the practical meaning of the phrase: a social triumph. All the next day after the offering the cup, her steps were dogged by anxious-faced boys, each one striving to be the first and only one to speak to her alone. To every boy of them all, Teresa returned the selfsame answer, —

"Sorry; but I'm going to row with Buddie."

Not that Buddie had asked her to row with him, however. A friendship such as theirs can take a good many things for granted.

A day of belated sultriness heralded the race. Almost everybody was late to breakfast, that morning, by reason of having had to dig down to the bottom of the trunks for the summer thin things which they had folded away to be put on no more. Everybody, when he did come into the dining-room, halted

beside some one of the fourteen contestants to express commiseration. However, they one and all of them agreed, it could not fail to freshen up a little by the afternoon.

It did fail to freshen up a little, though, did fail entirely. Indeed, to all appearing, the wheel of time had slipped a cog, and, without warning, September had given place to July. One by one, after luncheon, the contestants slipped away, to remove superfluous collars, and to roll up their sleeves, and to splash cold, cold water on their heads. The grown-ups, meanwhile, all but a few lusty, sun-proof college girls and energetic and devoted men, decided to await the finish of the race, seated in the cool comfort of the wide verandah.

Soon after two o'clock, they all set out: the boys and girls, bare-headed and bare-armed, to paddle slowly up the sunny lake, the others to tramp by the longer, shadier route along the shore. The rest of the assembly watched them out of sight; then they settled themselves at their ease, to sew and read and gossip, until once more the boats came into view around the rocky barrier at the bend which cut the lake so nearly into two.

Miss Julia, slim and dainty in her lace and muslin frock, and to all seeming wholly imperturbable, was a good deal annoyed, as time went on, to find her needle shaking in her fingers. Her eager little smile, bent upon her companion of the moment, totally concealed her real wish that he would subside into silence and allow her to focus her entire attention upon that bend in the wooded shore of the lake, upon the bend, and, even more, upon the thing which was to come around it. It seemed to her that her im-

patience had double the reason for its existence above that of any of the others. True, they all were kin to one or another of the contestants; but with her it was quite different. One boat held her all. Indeed, for the hour, Miss Julia felt almost as much related to Teresa as she did to Buddie. The past week when the girl had been wholly her own charge, had multiplied Miss Julia's love for her to many times its former volume. Teresa was not the sort of girl that one took passively. One either loved her, or else let her alone entirely. Beneath her placid, polite little smile, Miss Julia's heart bumped proudly, while she recalled the two of them as they had paddled past her, resting an instant on their oars to fling up their bare arms in gay salute, before they headed for the middle of the lake, and so on and on till they reached the bend. Teresa's pigtails were knotted out of sight beneath a gay bandanna, and Buddie's red head gleamed like a beacon in the sun. Nevertheless, Miss Julia told herself quite simply that no other boat could show a sight one half so comely. As for the rest of it, they certainly did know how to row. How Daddy, stroke of his own 'varsity crew, would revel in the letter she would write to him about it!

The man behind Miss Julia's chair spoke suddenly.

"Nasty-looking sky!" he said briefly.

Forgetful of her companion, Miss Julia glanced up and over her right shoulder. A great gray bulk of cloud was climbing over the mountain opposite, its nearer curves stained with dull yellow, its hollows black with threatenings of wind. And, as Miss Julia watched it climbing higher, coming nearer, the man behind her spoke again.

"There they come!" he said.

Miss Julia dropped her eyes to the surface of the lake, now turned from blue to the tint of hardest steel. Around the bend came one boat and then, a good deal later, came another, and then, in swift succession, two more, and then a third. Heedless, for an instant, of the coming storm, Miss Julia held her breath and strained her eyes. Then, regardless of her needle, she clasped her hands in ecstasy. The foremost boat held two spots of vivid colour: Teresa's gay bandanna, Buddie's hair.

The man behind her spoke once more.

"Just in the nick of time!" he said. "It's bound to be a race now, in good earnest."

And Miss Julia, listening, had a sharp realization that, under his apparent nonchalance, his voice held a new note, a note of downright fear. She glanced up and out. The cloud had crossed the mountain now, and seemed to be rushing down upon the lake which was growing dark and angry beneath the unearthly yellow light of storm. The water was roughening, too. It hissed and splashed and chattered against the stones below the verandah where they sat; and, out in the middle of the lake, the steely gray expanse was flecked here and there with a little, wavering line of white.

"I don't know of any place," the man behind was saying, in answer to some question. "The shore is rocky, from one end to the other. Really, this is about the only landing that I know."

Miss Julia hated lying. Nevertheless, for the moment, she had a furious wish that state prison should await the man who dared speak out an ugly truth. And, after all, was it a truth? Outside of

books and the daily papers, did such things ever really happen? She gave a stout denial to the question; but she shut her teeth and held her breath in fear, as the foremost boat, Buddie's boat, came near and nearer the rocky barrier where now the foam was splashing white.

"Jove!"

Something in the accent made Miss Julia shut her eyes in mortal terror of what they, open, might be forced to see. Then the seemingly interminable silence made her open them once more. The interval had been a good deal longer than she had been aware. Six boats had passed the rocky barrier, and the seventh was coming bravely on. Far, far in the lead of them all was Buddie; but the yellowish-gray cloud was now almost on top of him; around him the steel-gray mirror had turned to a white and sizzling foam, while already, only a little way above the rocky barricade, the water was lashed beneath the first spatter of the falling leaden drops.

After that single word of exclamation, no one spoke again. They merely watched and waited in an utter silence, watched while the storm grew fiercer, waited to see it overwhelm entirely the little green boats, rushing at top speed, as it seemed, for shelter. The time appeared to them all unending. Only by checking off the oar-strokes against the ticking of their watches and their own pulse-beats could the on-lookers realize that the strain was not going on for hours and hours on end. And if they, looking on, felt the time agonizing, what must those children feel, afloat in such a sea? The men stuck their fists into their trouser pockets and chewed their lips, while they tramped to and fro on the verandah.

One mother, at Miss Julia's elbow, became hysterical and wept aloud; but Miss Julia just sat quiet, her eyes upon the foremost boat with its two little dabs of colour, her mind, as much as it was upon anything, on Daddy.

But the boats were coming nearer now, Buddie still far in the lead; coming nearer and nearer to the verandah where she sat, racing neck and neck with the storm. And the landing-place was a good six hundred feet farther down, a floating bit of platform, now churning wildly up and down among the waves. Even if they reached it, could they ever land?

The landing was out of sight from the verandah. As the first boats of the little fleet swept past the dining cabin, a half a dozen men, heedless of the rain, now pelting heavily around them, went dashing out from shelter, out along the woodland path which led down to the landing-place.

Miss Julia sat staring after them in dull apathy. How could they bear the sight, she wondered stupidly. Those children were sure to drown, helpless in such a storm as that; how could strong men willingly look on upon the scene? Even at the distance where she sat, she shut her eyes tight, tight, and waited, white and motionless, amid the frightened stillness which had followed upon the first noisy patter of the rain.

It seemed to her that she had sat there always; that the stillness had lasted from the beginning of all things up to the very end of all remotest time, until, of a sudden, the stillness was shattered by the crashing of the heavens, as a shaft of flame ran down a tree trunk, not twenty feet away. The smash and splintering of wood came hard upon the crashing of

the thunder, and with it came the renewed roaring of the rain. Above the rain, however, there arose another sound, a jovial and hilarious sound; Buddie's voice, nonchalant, and yet pitched very high in his excitement.

"Hullo there, everybody! We won out! It's Teresa's cup, though, for I'd never have put it through alone," he shouted, as he came dashing up the steps, with Teresa, dripping, by his side. "It was a tight race, at the last; we only made it, by a boatlength. But look at us, Aunt Julia!" And he seemed, as he shook the rain drops from his drenched shoulders, to have no notion of the literal truth wherewith he spoke. "We came within a half an ace of being drowned."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### BUDDIE'S SURPRISE

"BUDDIE," Miss Julia looked up from her letter, as he came slowly up the steps; "perhaps, after all, it is about as well that you did n't get yourself drowned, yesterday."

That was another good thing about Aunt Julia, Buddie reflected swiftly. She never made belated lamentations over the things that might have happened.

"Why?" he questioned, as casually as if Miss Julia's shaking hands, her teeth chattering as in an ague, had not at last brought home to him, the day before, the fact that their little boat had been racing for something quite alien to a silver cup.

Miss Julia laughed, while she tucked the letter into the front of her gown with an odd little air of haste.

"Oh, several reasons. It would have been very horrid, you know." Then, quite suddenly, her voice changed. "Buddie child, you'll never realize what those minutes were to me. Did n't you truly know the danger you were in?"

"Not a bit, Aunt Julia; nor Teresa, either. We were rowing for the cup; we had n't any time to think about our getting rained on."

"But, if you had capsized?" Miss Julia urged him, for, for some reason or other, she longed to bring the

matter home to him quite forcibly. It seemed hardly fair to her that the boy should have no notion of all the agonies which she had undergone.

Buddie's calm, however, remained impenetrable.

"We could n't; that is, not as long as we sat still, and kept our heads, and kept rowing," he made optimistic answer. "It 's only the fellows that get scared and forget to keep the boat head on and going, who get upset. If I 'd let myself go over in that storm, I 'd never have been able to face Daddy again, in all my life."

"Very likely not," Miss Julia assented just a little dryly. Then once more her accent quickened. "But, Buddie, when you saw that fearful yellowish cloud? Were n't you frightened then?" she queried.

Buddie's reply was matter of fact.

"Did n't see it, Aunt Julia. A fellow rowing in a race is n't star-gazing, as a rule. Leastways, if he is, he does n't generally win. But, I say, is n't it a beauty cup?"

And then Miss Julia gave it up. Instead, dropping the question of the peril of the day before, she came to matters of the present hour.

"Buddie, I've just had a letter," she said a little tremulously.

Buddie's composure was still invulnerable, even before the news that she had imparted.

"So I saw," he assured her.

"Yes. It — it's from — a friend," Miss Julia told him.

"The insurance man!" Buddie commented beneath his breath. "That's why she is so everlastingly rattled."

"He's coming here, to-day," Miss Julia added.

Buddie became alert.

"Is he? That's good. To stay?"

"Only for a day. Still," Miss Julia spoke as if to herself; "that is a great deal better than nothing."

"Sure," Buddie assented, with an enthusiasm which surprised Miss Julia who, quite naturally, could not be aware of the interpretation Buddie had given to her agitation of a moment earlier. Indeed, Miss Julia still held fast to the wide-spread but erroneous theory that every healthy boy disdains romance. Buddie was as hard as nails; but he had come to feel an almost paternal interest in the heart-history of the insurance man, unknown and nameless though he was. "What's his name?" he asked suddenly, out of the mazes of his thought.

Miss Julia hesitated, flushed.

"Alan," she said at last.

Buddie nodded.

"Same as Daddy's middle one. It's a good name, too; not so awfully common as some."

Miss Julia made a futile attempt to trace the working of Buddie's brain. Then she gave it up. Indeed, that was always the charm of Buddie, she admitted to herself. Most people were so obvious.

"I probably shall need you to help entertain him," she said, as she rose to her feet.

"You will?"

Miss Julia mistook the utter astonishment in Buddie's voice for extreme reluctance. She spoke with sudden decision.

"Yes. Remember that, next to me, you are the host, you know. That's what it means to be one of a family."

"I know that," Buddie responded, with a good

temper quite unimpaired by the implied rebuke. "I only thought you'd want to keep him for yourself, especially as he can't stay with you any longer than just the one day."

Miss Julia shook her head, laughing at some joke which Buddie, for the life of him, could not see.

"No, Buddie. I promise that I'll share him with you. I'm very fond of him; but I think it's only fair that you should have a chance at him, too. I want you to take him out rowing. He'll like to see how well you do it."

"And Teresa?" Buddie suggested loyally.

Miss Julia, though, had already turned to go away. She spoke from over her shoulder.

"We'll see," she said.

Left to himself, Buddie straightway departed in search of Teresa, and together they discussed Miss Julia's tidings in all their length and breadth. Together, too, they agreed that, from all signs, the expected guest must be the insurance man, Miss Julia's friend of long ago. First, though, Teresa balked at the name.

"Alan!" she said. "That does n't seem quite right."

"I thought you told me, the time you did tell me, that his name should never cross your lips," Buddie reminded her. "Bet you it was because you did n't know a single thing about it."

"I did n't then," Teresa admitted candidly. "I asked my mother, though, the very next day."

"Oh!" Buddie had the air of being slightly disappointed that Teresa's honour was better than he had supposed. "Well, what was it?"

Teresa frowned.

"That's what I was trying to remember," she said, after a little interval.

Buddie felt it was time that he asserted his masculine superiority. Else, Teresa might go to taking on airs.

"Well, there's no especial sense in remembering, when I know. It's Alan."

"How do you know?"

"Aunt Julia said so."

Then Teresa scored.

"She did not. She only said that it was Alan who was coming. She never said a word about its being the insurance man. You made that up, yourself."

A crisis seemed to be close at hand. Indeed, both sets of nerves were still a little shaky, after the strain of the day before. Buddie averted that crisis by offering a fresh plank for division.

"She has asked me to take him out in the boat," he announced.

Teresa's face lighted.

"Splendid! When will we go?" she asked eagerly.

"The best boat does n't hold but two," Buddie reminded her ruthlessly. Then, secure in this practical assertion of his superiority, he relented just a little. "Perhaps she will ask you to show him the way to the grotto."

Teresa caught at this slight straw of consolation.

"That would be lovely, Buddie. When does he get here?"

"Two o'clock."

"Two. That shows he's coming from the north," Teresa commented shrewdly. "Maybe he has been up in the Klondyke, digging up gold nuggets. Is n't it splendid, Buddie? And I suppose that now she 's

in her room, choosing out her softest raiment to do him honour."

"Women always do have to do such a lot of prinking," Buddie asserted.

"So do men, only theirs never counts for anything, after they've done it. But Miss Julia is always lovely, even in the mornings. What do you suppose she will wear, Buddie?"

"How should I know? Her best clothes, I suppose."

"Yes; but what sort?" Teresa persisted. "Of course, they must be long and trailing, with a flower in her belt as signal."

"For the train to stop?" Buddie queried, a little bit unkindly.

"No, stupid! Signal to him that she is true to their old affection. And she'll have a soft lace scarf about her shoulders, and carry a missal in her hands."

This time, Teresa's romantic heart misled her. Buddie roared.

"Missal be hanged, Teresa! What do you suppose a missal is, anyhow?"

"I — I'm not just sure." The voice came from between two very pink cheeks.

"I am, then. A missal is some sort of a prayer book. What in thunder would Aunt Julia be doing with that, down at the station, or with a soft, trailing frock, either, for that matter?"

However, as it chanced, Miss Julia did not go to the station to meet her friend. Teresa found that fact distinctly disappointing, as disappointing as was the simple tailor-made frock that Miss Julia was wearing, when she came to luncheon. After luncheon, she called Buddie to her side.

"Buddie," she said; "I 'm going to ask you to go to the station to meet him."

"All right. But how'll I know him?" Buddie queried, not unnaturally.

The query seemed to be a poser. To all appearing, Miss Julia had not thought of it before.

"Why – y," she said, a little vaguely; "I think you won't have any trouble. He's tall, and a little older than I am; and, besides, there won't be so many men getting off the train here, as late in the season as it is."

Buddie nodded.

"I did n't think of that," he said. "Well, I'll make a bluff at it, anyhow. Can I take Ebenezer?"

"Better not. He might get in the way of things," Miss Julia advised. "Best be starting, Buddie. It's almost time."

The station was only a few hundred feet away, and in full view of the verandah. Side by side, Miss Julia and Ebenezer watched Buddie, as he tramped off along the dusty road, stepped up upon the platform and took his stand there to await the coming of the train. Then, as there came a distant whistle, and then another close at hand, Miss Julia's heart beat rapidly, and her hand shut tight upon Ebenezer's topmost tuft of hair.

Buddie, meanwhile, as the train slid in, appeared to be expecting the awaited guest to be landed from the baggage car; that is, if one might judge from the place where he took his stand, as well as from the direction of his eyes. It was a full minute before he became aware of the tall man waiting at the other end of the platform. Ebenezer, six hundred feet away, was more alert than Buddie. He had

seen the expected guest alight, had seen and recognized him. With one great shriek, a shriek so full of joy as to be close akin to agony, the gray dog tore himself from Miss Julia's hand and went hurtling down the road at fullest speed, barking as one possessed.

Frightened lest the dog throw himself before the moving train, Buddie sprang to catch him; but, for the once, Ebenezer was deaf to his master's voice. Upsetting Buddie as casually as the ball upsets the ninepin in the alley, Ebenezer went tearing down the station platform and flung himself upon the guest, with embracing paws and flapping tongue and little cries and moans of more than human pleasure. And Buddie, prostrate on the cindery platform, turned his head to look. An instant later, he was on his feet and hurling himself on top of Ebenezer into the arms of the guest.

"Daddy!" And then, for just a little while, Ebenezer had the conversation entirely to himself.

Buddie did take his father out in the boat, that afternoon; and Teresa, down at the landing to see them off, felt no repinings because she must be left behind.

"It's only for one day, you know, Teresa," Buddie consoled her, as they all walked down to the boats together.

Teresa turned to the tall man who walked between herself and Buddie.

"Is that all, really? I thought, now it is you, you'd come to stay."

Daddy caught swiftly at the hint of mystery in her phrase.

"If it had n't been I, whom did you expect?" he asked her.

Teresa cast a hasty, furtive glance at Miss Julia, walking at Buddie's other hand. Then she laid her finger on her lip.

"I'll tell you, next time you come. But why can't you stay now?"

Daddy laughed, and, to Buddie's anxious ear, the laugh had all its old, rumbling sound. Indeed, this brown and sturdy-looking man was not at all the sickly Daddy he had been bracing himself to see, granted, as began to seem unlikely, he ever did see Daddy again at all.

"Remember I'm a run-away, this time," he told Teresa. "I could only get a forty-eight-hour leave of absence. Buddie was so near me, though, since you all came up here, that I could n't stand the temptation. But to-morrow night must find me back in camp."

"Must it really, Daddy?" Buddie's voice was very wishful.

"Yes, son. It must. But I shall have had a chance to look you over, and see for myself how you are getting on. Besides, it is now nothing but a matter of time before I can come back to stay."

"How long?" Buddie demanded baldly.

Daddy shook his head.

"Buddie," he answered; "when one gets to where he is in sight of the one goal he is working for, he does n't waste any time in measuring the road; he just goes tramping off along it as fast as ever he can."

And that was all the answer to his question that Buddie was destined to get.

Buddie and his father were out in the boat to-

gether, all that livelong afternoon. Sometimes Buddie rowed a little; but more often they drifted, drifted slowly to and fro beneath the yellowing autumn sun. It was Buddie who did nearly all the talking. Forgetful of his frequent letters, he told over to Daddy everything that had happened to him and to Ebenezer since the two of them had driven up to Miss Julia's doorway on that far-off, memorable afternoon. He told about Ebenezer and Pet-Lamb and the front stairs. He told about Mr. Baldwin and the mouse, and about the duckling, and about the circus. He told about Teresa and the playhouse and the fair and Rosa and the scouts and little Tootles. And then he told about Aunt Julia: how she never fussed, and always knew the things a fellow liked to eat; and how, when she really had to scold a fellow, she did it quick and had it over, without putting on all the frills about being so sorry and so disappointed and so surprised. And then he went back and told it all over again; but, first, he rowed up to the head of the lake, just to show Daddy how his stroke had improved, this last summer.

And Daddy, leaning back and listening, took careful note of many things that Buddie did not say. He saw the sturdy, well-knit figure, saw the free, strong play of muscles beneath the boy's thin shirt, saw the deep, even breathing which, plainer than any wordy argument, assured his doctor's eye that all was well with Buddie's inner man. And the outer man also was very good to watch, it seemed to Daddy, as his eyes swept over the well-poised head and met the answering, adoring gaze of two honest, level brown eyes which looked out at him from the frank

and hearty, albeit snub-nosed, countenance of his sunburned son. Yes, all was well with Buddie's body and, to all seeming, with his soul.

Over and above all else, Daddy noted with some surprise the curiously close relation which seemed to exist between his half-sister and his son. Daddy had not looked for anything like that. He had been perfectly sure that Miss Julia would be very good to Buddie; her conscience and her loyalty had assured him of so much, at least. But that she would ever really care for Buddie, or that Buddie would care for her: that surpassed the limits of his expectation. And now, to all seeming, he found them a pair of most devoted chums. Of course, Buddie was a singularly lovable young rascal. Nevertheless, Daddy, remembering Miss Julia's old-time methodical ways of life, wondered if she too, like all the rest of the world, were changing. Had her greeting to himself, that noon, been more human in its cordiality than it ever had been of yore? That Miss Julia was astoundingly good to Buddie, Daddy, seeing them both together, could feel no sort of doubt. Perhaps, though, the time might come when the benefit would prove not to have been all on the one side.

They stayed out in the boat until the shadows grew long and cold across the water. Then reluctantly Daddy gave the word for their return to shore. The afternoon, to all seeming, had been only about two minutes long, and Daddy had a sinister foreboding that the evening would not have any length at all. Indeed, it seemed to all of them that dinner was scarcely ended, when the clock struck ten; and Daddy, as in duty bound, hugged Buddie tight and then sent him off to bed.

Curiously enough, it was not until then that Daddy heard anything about the race of the day before. The man who had stood behind Miss Julia told him; and Daddy, while he listened, whitened through his tan. He almost ignored the man's tribute to Buddie's pluck and skill, so intent was he in reconciling himself to the thought of the peril which, after all, had passed them by.

The man, by the way, was a new-comer at the camp, that year, and so, to all intents and purposes, a stranger to Miss Julia. Miss Julia had ignored him at the first. Then, because he was lonely and looked harmless and evidently admired Buddie, she had relented and, from casual nods, had passed on to the stage of an occasional bit of talk with him about the weather, or the trains, or the latest frolic of the children. Her introducing him to Daddy, that night after Buddie had gone to bed, had been the result of the merest chance, a chance, though, which was destined to be far-reaching.

Daddy, very human as he was, sat and listened smilingly to the stranger's words about Buddie's prowess in all the sports, about the boyish unconsciousness of any charm. The stranger liked boys. Moreover, as his talk showed, he understood them. The two men discussed certain boyish problems at great length, while Miss Julia sat by, silent and doing her level best to conceal the fact that she was deadly sleepy. All at once, the stranger seemed to come to realizing sense of her presence and of his own lack of manners. Turning, he addressed Miss Julia.

"Buddie's tranquil unconcern, yesterday," he said, with an odd little smile; "reminds me of something I saw, not long ago, out in the Rocky Mountains."

Miss Julia suppressed a yawn. When her jaws had relaxed from the strain she had been forced to put upon them, —

"What was that?" she asked politely.

The man's eyes lighted, as at some amusing recollection.

"It was up in the mountains, where they were building a flume. One of the engineers, an eastern man, Brooks MacDougall, was working there."

Miss Julia straightened in her chair. Her drowsiness had left her very suddenly. Nevertheless, it was doubtful whether she heard ten words of the long story which the stranger told her and at which Daddy laughed so heartily. When it was ended,—

"One of the engineers?" she queried, harking back to the beginning of the story.

"Yes, after a fashion. He had n't taken his degree; but he had made a good practical record, the past two or three years, even without it."

"You knew him, then?"

"Yes. We grew to be great chums."

Miss Julia apparently lost herself in contemplation of a broken thread in one of her lace cuffs. At last and rather slowly she spoke, a good deal as if she were forcing herself to show an interest she really did not feel.

"Brooks MacDougall? It is an odd name; but I knew a man of that name, ever so long ago," she said. "Is n't it strange how names repeat themselves?"

The stranger nodded.

"They do, though, and constantly. I shall see MacDougall in Denver, before long, and I shall ask him if he happens to know you."

As if with an effort Miss Julia raised her eyes. Her voice, though, made the stranger feel how little his words counted.

"If he does," she assented very casually; "you might tell him how much I'd like to see him again." Then she rose. "Ernest," she said to her brother; "it is all hours of the night. I think, if you'll excuse me, I'd really better go to bed."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### EBENEZER AND THE BISHOP

AMONG the things to be definitely settled, during Daddy's brief visit to the lake, had been the fact that Buddie was quite too young to be confirmed.

Buddie himself had known his hours of yearning for the rite; less, it must be confessed, from any spiritual awakening, than because Eric was to be in this-year's class. Buddie had a healthy antipathy to the idea of Eric's getting ahead of him in anything whatever. It would have been a matter of solid satisfaction to Buddie to have the Bishop laying hands on him before any of the Hamiltons: Teresa, Sandy, but most especially Eric. Eric had been so pleased about the approaching confirmation. He had even used it as an offset to Buddie's captaincy of the boy scouts, had implied that it held within itself the greater honour. Buddie doubted. None the less, he would have been glad to have accumulated for himself both honours. He could have measured them up a good deal better, if only they both had fallen on himself.

However, Daddy's fiat had gone forth, and Buddie, outwardly resigned, but mutinous within, was forced to abide by Daddy's emphatic orders.

During the weeks that were devoted to the systematic training of the confirmation class, Buddie

drooped perceptibly. The fact was that Eric was increasingly smug over his own approaching sanctification, and was taking it out upon the other boys accordingly. For the most part, the other boys did not care so much as a row of pins; but Buddie did care. Still accordingly, Eric not only kept up the process of taking it out, but he also came to focus all his efforts upon Buddie. He only gained a partial suppression from the fact that, just at this very time, Buddie was chosen to lead the choir, while he himself, whose voice rivalled the strident katydids in the trees outside his window, was passed by utterly, when the new boys were tested for the choir.

That next Sunday morning, Buddie felt his time had come. Furthermore, he intended that Eric should feel it, too. Therefore his eye was fixed on Eric's face, as he came marching up the aisle, singing with malicious emphasis, —

"Am *I* a soldier of the cross?"

However, his triumph was short-lived. His eyes had been on Eric's face, not on the steps before him; and his triumph ended abruptly, cut in two by Eric's snicker when his rival, stumbling at the step, and hampered by his unaccustomed petticoats, landed within the chancel in an attitude by far more reverent than were the thoughts that surged and seethed within his brain.

After that, for a season, honours were easy between the two boys. They became uneasy again, however, as also did the boys themselves, as the time for the Bishop's visit drew near at hand. Then, quite unexpectedly to both of them, Buddie's star arose and shot across the sky, vivid as a comet with the

fieriest sort of tail. Miss Julia was going to have the Bishop stay at her house over night.

Miss Julia, when she had sent out the invitation, had had no notion that she was working towards the glorification of her young nephew. Perhaps the idea might have crossed her brain, if only she had happened to remember that her young nephew's name was Ernest Angell. However, four or five months of daily association with Buddie had blotted that fact completely from the tablet of her mind. Buddie was Buddie, she had learned, and most irresponsibly human; he was neither earnest nor angelic in the very least.

Nevertheless, it is safe to say that Miss Julia would have added an urgent postscript to her note of invitation, had she even dreamed of what the note and its acceptance meant to Buddie. In her ignorance, she wrote quite simply, and with the degree of cordiality that one bestows on a friend so old that his fame counts for nothing in the relation. However, as the Bishop had received no other invitation of any sort, he responded to Miss Julia promptly and with a gratified acceptance. He knew her hospitality. And Buddie, in consequence of his acceptance, trod on air.

"I could n't very well help asking him, you know," Miss Julia said to Buddie in needless explanation, after she had read the Bishop's note out loud. "He is such an old, old friend; he went to school with Daddy, and we 've always known him. Besides, with measles at the rectory, they really could n't have him there, and there did n't seem to be any other place for him to go."

Her last words had almost the flavour of an

apology. Buddie accepted the apology in gratitude, although he did not need it in the least. His cup of content was full enough without it. However, it added one more arrow to the quiver he was gathering up to use on Eric. The Bishop was something; but, even more than the Bishop, there was the undeniable fact that Miss Julia had apologized, apologized to himself, Buddie Angell, for the need of inflicting a mere Bishop upon his society. Buddie drew a long sigh of absolute content. Nothing less than Eric's sudden ordination to the priesthood could ever put him on his legs again.

The good Bishop himself would have known no small measure of delight, could he have been aware of the war that raged about his coming. Between his lawn sleeves and his official gaiters, there throbbed the heart of a veritable boy. His life was a curious monotony of roast fowl and distant adulation. The fact that two small and highly unregenerate youngsters were ready to come to fisticuffs about his impending visitation would have set him off into roars of laughter. Eric he had never seen; but of Buddie he had the keenest sort of a remembrance. No sane and human man who had had the pleasure of seeing the serious-minded Mr. Baldwin valiantly rise up to slay the mouse could ever have forgotten his debt of gratitude to the young reprobate who had set that mouse in motion. The Bishop remembered Buddie well. His memory stopped short, though, before it came to Ebenezer.

The confirmation was on a Wednesday evening in October. The Bishop arrived just in season for afternoon tea; and Miss Julia, from some vague theory of reverence, decided to banish Pet-Lamb

The Bishop arrived just in season for afternoon tea.
*Page 226.*

from the function. Unhappily, however, Pet-Lamb had theories of her own concerning reverence. She wailed aloud to be permitted to enter the Bishop's presence, she clawed at doors and at the hem of Lena's frock. Finally, as the time went on and the clinking of cups behind closed doors assured her that the tea was disappearing, she summoned to her rescue all of her feline agility. She climbed upon a chair, set close outside the door; and, next time that Lena entered the room with more hot muffins in her hand, Pet-Lamb entered, too, riding triumphantly on Lena's back at the exact spot between the shoulders where only an alien hand, and that a firm one, could dislodge her. It was an alien hand, and that the Bishop's, which finally dislodged her. Miss Julia protested and apologized; but Pet-Lamb was infinitely better mannered. She merely showed her gratitude, a gratitude which manifested itself by rubbing against the Bishop's gaiters and covering them with all the white hairs that were left over from a belated moulting.

Miss Julia thanked her lucky stars, all things considered, that Buddie had not been on hand for tea. The next thing, had he been present, would have been a demand for the admission of Ebenezer, and Ebenezer's table manners were still a little at loose ends. She thanked her lucky stars again when Buddie turned up, promptly on time, at the early dinner which the hour for the confirmation service had rendered necessary. Buddie, to all appearing, had decided to put his best foot forward, on the great occasion of having a Bishop sit beside him at the table. Quite of his own accord, he had groomed himself with the utmost care; he had put on his

stiffest shirt, his widest collar, his dinner jacket and even his brand-new patent leather pumps. He even, and Miss Julia gasped at the discovery, was wearing a fat red rose pinned in his buttonhole. Miss Julia could not be expected to be aware that all this finery, however, had been put on, not for the gratification of their guest, the Bishop, but for the later influence on Eric who could not fail to see him when, just before the service, he sauntered into the choir-room where, for the once, both choir and confirmation class must be herded indiscriminately.

At the table, the Bishop led the talk away from matters that concerned the diocese, matters that Miss Julia had broached, as in duty bound. Instead, he talked delightfully of rowing, and of the Yale-Harvard game he had seen, at his class reunion, and of his pet horse, Pickwick, who always knew when Sunday came and he had to allow everything to pass him on the road.

"I believe," the Bishop remarked, from above the cheese; "that I like every animal in the world but one. I don't like dogs at all; in fact, I must confess that I 'm afraid of them."

And Buddie, hearing, rejoiced that Ebenezer had been out in the woods with him from school time up to the hour when it had been necessary to dress for dinner. During the dinner and immediately after, there was never any need to question Ebenezer's whereabouts. The cook always settled that. So expert a dish-scraper, so capacious a waste-pail was sure to find a welcome in any well-conducted kitchen.

As they arose from the table, Miss Julia turned to the Bishop, with a deferential little smile which seemed intended to remind him that their hour of

equality was at an end, that now was the time for him to mount his pedestal.

"Buddie is in the choir," she said. "He has to go early, and I am going down with him. I may be needed to help the girls put on their veils. Besides, you will like a little time to yourself, before the service."

The Bishop sought to protest a little.

"But — " he was beginning.

Miss Julia waved his words aside.

"Lena will ring the bell in the upper hall," she told him; "when the carriage is ready. It should be about half an hour." And, marshalling the resplendent Buddie before her, she departed and left the Bishop to his meditations.

Buddie also sought to protest a little.

"Hang it, Aunt Julia! There 's lots of time. Who wants to stand around that snuffy choir-room, half the evening?" he rebelled, for indeed it was vexatious to have his gorgeous and triumphal entry upon Eric's field of vision spoiled in such a way as that.

But Miss Julia, for the once, was obdurate.

"Hush, Buddie dear! You will disturb the Bishop," she warned him swiftly. "It is best for us to go down early, so run up and change your coat, while I put on my hat."

"Change my coat!" Buddie echoed stonily.

"Yes. You can't wear that one into church."

"Why not? Under my cassock, it won't show," Buddie argued.

Miss Julia wondered a little that Buddie, who usually disregarded finery completely, should be so very insistent. She laughed, though, as she answered.

"As a general thing, Buddie, people don't wear evening clothes to church," she told him.

And Buddie, who knew the quality of her different laughs, forebore to argue further. Instead, he submitted to the eclipsing of his dreamed-of glories, marched up the stairs on his heels, regardless of the meditations of the Bishop, and changed back again into his customary raiment. Then, as outlet for his injured feelings, he descended by way of the back stairs and kitchen, in order to bestow a tempestuous hug on Ebenezer. But Ebenezer, his mind upon the dripping-pans, received him casually. Buddie, his feelings injured anew, went to join Miss Julia, waiting in the front hall. By this fresh injury to his feelings, moreover, he was quite too much upset to heed the fact that he had neglected to shut any of the doors behind him.

Miss Julia was needed to help the girls put on their veils, it proved. She spent the busiest sort of a half-hour, after she reached the church. Indeed, she would have been glad of a half-hour longer; and it seemed to her no time at all before the organ began to peal forth the voluntary, and it was necessary for her to go out and take her place among the waiting congregation. Even then, as she bowed her head devoutly, her brain was far more full of such small details as tulle and hairpins and refractory buttons than it was of the solemn rite ahead of her. Resolutely and devoutly, Miss Julia clasped her hands until they pinched each other, and set herself to herd back her wandering thoughts. As result, they wandered a good deal faster and a good deal farther. After floundering about quite aimlessly for a while, they came to rest upon the clatter

of knives and plates, the fragrance of stale cooking which had been wafted to her, just as Buddie had joined her in the hall. She hoped most earnestly that they had not found their way up to the Bishop's room, to disturb him in his before-the-service meditations. For her part, she found even the memory of them most disturbing. By the way, where was the Bishop?

Miss Julia's wandering attention came back to the present with a little jerk. In fact, where was everybody? Everybody, that is, who should have been filling up the chancel? Instead, the chancel was quite empty, save for the organist who had played his voluntary twice over, and now was improvising on the theme of his earliest five-finger exercises. He had finished with all the heavier stops, by the time Miss Julia had returned to her present surroundings, and now he was twiddling two fingers, while the organ shrilled like a flute in a bad ague. Above and behind the meagre fluting, Miss Julia was able to make out another sound, intermittent and hilarious, the sound of merry choir-boys who are being instructed to repress their merriment. What in the world was happening? Buddie had had his cotta on, long before she had come out of the choir-room. Why did they not start the processional?

As if in answer to the question, the choir-room door opened ever so slightly, and the face of the rector, looking abnormally round and red above his surplice, appeared within the crack. His eyes moved slowly along the ranks of the pews, until they came to rest upon Miss Julia's face. Resting, they became appealing; and the appeal was doubled by means of a beckoning forefinger.

Quite at a loss to explain this ghostly admonition and too much astounded to go forth to meet it, Miss Julia sat and stared back at the rector. The rector, too, appeared to be astounded about something, and to have parted with all his wonted presence of mind in consequence. He beckoned once more, quite frantically, this time. Then, as that had no effect upon Miss Julia, he pushed his face close into the door-crack and fell to gesticulating violently with his lips. If only Miss Julia had been a deaf-mute and trained accordingly, she would have had no trouble in making out his question, —

"Where — is — the — Bishop?"

Instead, she sat there, rigid, and stared back again, while she tried in vain to recall her first-aid lectures and remember what they had said about insanity.

At last, the rector gave it up. He paused in his gesticulations and looked about him in search of an usher, or a warden, or something else that could be pressed into service in the crisis. Then, after a vain search, the door clicked to behind him. There was a short delay. Then once more the door swung open and Eric Hamilton came forth, clad in his best clothes and wrapped in a mantle of self-consciousness that seemed to himself most exquisite. His very shoes creaked forth the message of his own importance, as he tiptoed elaborately across the church and into Miss Julia's pew.

"He says would you please tell him where in the world is the Bishop?" was the question Eric, in a stentorian whisper, delivered into Miss Julia's upturned ear.

"I don't know, Eric," Miss Julia answered blankly. "I have n't got him. Wait!!"

But she was too late. Eric was already tiptoeing back again, to bear her answer to the waiting rector. He was gone for just a moment only. Then he reappeared, his sense of importance greater than ever, and his boots creaking with even more violence than before.

"He says you did have him, at dinner time," Eric reported, and, by now, his whisper could be heard plainly in the outer portals of the sanctuary. "And would you mind going back to see what 's got him? He 's waited more than twenty minutes now, and he 's very sure it must be something serious."

"Why has n't he sent Buddie, then?" Miss Julia queried.

Eric plainly gloated over the tenor of his own reply.

"He would have, he said, Miss Julia; but he said, in a case like this, he felt he ought to send some one a little more reliable." And then, with the blushing Miss Julia at his heels, Eric led the way out of church once more, his face alight with his contented surety that Buddie and the choir and even the confirmation service, granted that the Bishop finally appeared and it came off, would fall into total insignificance beside the earlier sensation of which he alone had been the outward and visible sign.

Miss Julia's house was a long half-mile from the church door. As a rule, she did not mind the distance in the least; but, to-night, the way seemed to her interminable. With each new step she took along it, too, a new fear shot up into her mind, and the fears, one and all, concerned the Bishop. Had the cherries in the ice cream poisoned him? Had he fallen down the stairs and broken a good many of

his bones? Had he had an apoplexy? Had he suddenly gone out of his ecclesiastical mind? Had he — And each one of the *hads* branched out into at least a dozen minor possibilities. Miss Julia was thirty-one years and nine months old, and it was at least half that time since she had run a race. Nevertheless, it is no exaggeration to say that she sprinted, all along the latter half of the way home.

The house, as she turned in across the lawn, looked peaceful, innocent of holding any evil thing. The usual lights burned in just the usual places. The usual hum of low voices came from the servants' wing; and — Was it, or was it not the dim form of the carriage which stood waiting in the drive, a stone's throw from the closed front door?

The driver touched his hat.

"I 'm waiting here since half an hour, Miss Tenney," he told her, as if to ward off from himself any hint of blame. "His Riverence seems a little slow in coming down."

Miss Julia fumbled for her latchkey, opened the door, walked in. The place was just as she had left it, quiet, peaceful, orderly. No Bishop, though, was to be seen; the only sign of life was Ebenezer, lying on the top step of the stairway, Ebenezer, crouched low and glaring sulky defiance at an invisible something behind the closed door above him, the door of the best guestroom, Miss Julia noted swiftly, the Bishop's door. The knob of the outside door was still in her hand, as she made the discovery. The latch clicked sharply, as she digested the discovery which she had made.

At the unexpected sound from below, the door above opened slightly, and a voice, the Bishop's

voice, cultured and courteous, but just now very full of trouble, proceeded from the crack.

"Will the person who is down there be good enough to call off the dog?" it said. "He appears to have mistaken me for a burglar, and he won't allow me to go down the stairs. And really, you know," the voice became appealing in its explanation; "it is n't at all decent for the Bishop to be a good half-hour late at church."

Ebenezer, always loyal to the interests of his master, had contrived to put Buddie once more at the bull's-eye of the situation.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE BURGLARS

THE long stretch of tin roof outside of Buddie's window had been a great source of comfort to him, during the hot nights of summer. Covering in a wide verandah, it was comparatively flat and level, furnishing a goodly promenade to any one who cared to walk abroad at night. The first time Buddie had yielded to its temptations, the moonlight had lain cool and white on the lawn below, and Buddie's room, still sweltering in the concentrated heat of the long June day, had seemed to him a cooking oven, rather than a place for sleep. Lifting the mosquito screen, he had stepped out into the cool, dewy night.

To Buddie, that night was always memorable. The moon was at its full; down on the lawn under the trees, the fireflies were flashing to and fro, vying in brightness with the stars above. From far away beyond the Hamilton orchard came the distant wail of the whip-poor-will, its melancholy shrillness dominating all the fainter, more cheery noises of the night. Buddie walked the length of the roof and back again. Then, fearful lest the crackling of the tin beneath his tread and the whimpering of Ebenezer, abandoned in the room behind him, should awake Miss Julia, he went back to the window and sat down beside it, his arm thrown up

across the ledge, in sociable communion with Ebenezer, crouched against the screen within.

He sat there long, watching the night and listening to it, feeling himself a part of it all; sat there until his eyes grew heavy with sleep. Then, quite reluctantly, he opened the screen and went back into the room once more. After the outside coolness, the clean freshness of the summer night, the place seemed to him more than ever stifling. Flinging himself upon the bed, he flapped about and turned and twisted, until the pillows looked like lumps of lead and the sheets were ropes. Then, with a bounce, he sprang to his feet. The very thing! Taking the smaller piece of the mattress under one arm, a pillow underneath the other and dragging a sheet in his teeth, he once more opened the screen, stepped through it and closed it after him. Two minutes later, Buddie was fast asleep in his improvised bed upon the flat tin roof.

Of course, Miss Julia found it out, next day. Not that Buddie made any effort, though, to keep the matter secret. It was only that he had things of more importance to talk about than how he had spent his night. The maid, however, when she went to do his room, had been prompt to discover, first the loss, and then the present whereabouts, of Buddie's extra bedding; and she reported the discoveries to Miss Julia.

Miss Julia, quite as promptly, had it out with Buddie. It might be cooler; but it was very dangerous. What if he rolled off, in the night? Buddie, very grave at the suggestion, gave her his word of honour that he would not roll off. Then what if Ebenezer, left alone, should scratch a hole in the

screen and go out to join his master, and should tumble off the edge? Buddie, still more grave at this second suggestion, promised Miss Julia on his solemn honour that he would always barricade the window with a chair. Besides, had she any notion how jolly it was to sleep outside, with nothing between one's pillow and the stars? As for catching cold, Daddy had told ever and ever so many people they must sleep outside, even people that had bad coughs.

That last statement set Miss Julia to thinking. For two or three days, she thought quite industriously. Meanwhile, the moon waned and the nights grew cooler, and Buddie decided that a bed with springs was a good deal better, after all. Ebenezer, moreover, agreed with Buddie. His vigils by the open window had not been very restful; and he gave a gigantic sigh of full content, the night he once more stretched himself out in bed at Buddie's side. His content, though, was short-lived. After a night or two, the weather turned once more; it was hotter than ever and by far more sultry. Buddie took to the roof again with all speed, and Ebenezer was once more left to mourn alone.

Next morning, Miss Julia spoke out and told her thoughts. Why not have an out-door cubby on the roof, so that Buddie could sleep out there, all summer long, in wet nights as well as dry? Buddie put a few questions; then he vetoed the plan with emphasis. Half the charm of his own arrangements had lain in their casualness, in their picnic-like quality. Done in this way, it was next best to camping out. Done under a roof, with movable lattice screens for sides and a real bed with springs,

it would be nothing in the world but sleeping in a leaky closet. No; he really would not roll off. He would promise always to keep his head at the top side, next the wall. He would even tie the pillow to the chair inside the room.

In the final end, Miss Julia made a compromise. If Buddie wished to move his bedding in and out, each night, let him. If he wished to have his face bared to the stars, let him. The verandah was completely hidden from the street; besides, there was nothing socially incriminating about a blanket and a pillow, or even about a sleeping suit of blue pongee. On the other hand, Buddie must give in and have an awning which, in case of need, could be let down above his head. Moreover, there must be a strong, close railing built around the roof. Otherwise, Miss Julia would say farewell to sleep until the winter snows drove Buddie back into his room once more.

And Buddie, who saw the common sense which underlay Miss Julia's two conditions, yielded to them, and added a new condition of his own: that the railing should be high enough to make it safe for Ebenezer to sleep out on the roof beside him.

However, Ebenezer proved quite ungrateful for the privilege. So long as Buddie shut him up alone in the room, Ebenezer slept with his gray muzzle pressed close against the wire mosquito netting, slept with one ear cocked upward, ready for any sudden summons from his master. No sooner was the railing finished, though, and Ebenezer given the freedom of the roof, than Ebenezer promptly changed his tactics. Once or twice in the night, he arose, stepped through the window where the screen had

been adjusted to fit his exact height, and perambulated the length and breadth of the roof to assure himself that all was well with his young master. Then, that done, he retired to his own bed chamber once more, stretched himself out on the least dismantled portion of the bed, and fell to snoring lustily. Moreover, such is the force of habit on us all that, after the first few nights, Miss Julia, light sleeper that she was, no longer heeded the muffled clatter of the tin beneath Ebenezer's hairy heels.

At first, on the hottest nights, and then, as time ran on, every night, Buddie dragged his apology for a bed out to the roof and slept upon it as only a healthy boy can sleep and even then only in the open air. His two weeks at the lake had seemed to him days of bliss and nights of dire imprisonment. No sooner was he back at home once more, although by then the nights were growing chilly, than he took up his old out-door habit again, took it up and maintained it, while the chill turned into frost, while his summer blankets came to seem no heavier than a bit of cheesecloth. Miss Julia, who had had a long talk with Daddy, merely smiled a little, produced a heap of scarlet blankets, and ordered a sleeping suit of flannel. Open air was cheap and healthy. Buddie should revel in it just as long as he should choose. For her own part, four open windows and a roof above her head were a good enough setting for her dreams.

It seemed to Buddie, as he dragged his bedding out across the window sill, one late October night, that he had never known such blackness, so thick and so very velvety. It was the dark of the moon, and cloudy withal, and the trees close about the

house still held their leaves, for they were aged oaks and kept their coats on till the winter came. From the lighted room behind him, a flaring cone cut across the roof of the verandah, shining upon his bed, but leaving the night around it in a blackness all the greater by comparison.

Buddie glanced up at the inky sky, out at the inky night, then fell to making up his bed with a deftness born of many nights of practise. That done, he went back into his room to undress and turn off the lights. Just as his hand was on the switch, however, he bethought himself of an apple he had brought up to his room, that noon. Moreover, with the demand for greater luxury which associates itself with pillows and bedtime and all that, he hunted out his knife from the chaos of his pockets. The gnawing of an apple went with the prosaic light of day. Night and its romance demanded peeling and then throwing away the core.

Despite the greater deliberation of the process, it seemed to Buddie that the apple lasted a very little while. Of course, it had taken a little longer to peel it, underneath the blankets; the corners got in the way of one's knife, and held one's elbows down so tightly. Still, the apple was pared and eaten in far too short a time; and then Buddie, heedless of the problem concerned in its digestion, shut his knife, and then, by far too sleepy to hunt a safe place to lay it down, went sliding off through dreamland, with the knife clasped tight in his left fist.

For three or four hours, he slept on soundly. Then, all at once, something, perhaps the consciousness of the large red apple, aroused him with a jerk.

He wakened with the feeling that comes to each of us now and then, the feeling that he had not really been asleep at all, so alert was he, so wide awake in every nerve and sense and muscle. How inky black the night was! And how still! And yet —

Buddie stiffened, underneath his blankets, stiffened not with terror, mind you, but with a stretched attention which was seeking to magnify the faintest hint into an actual fact. Was that a footstep that he had heard, down on the gravel path below? Was there a soft, soft whispering of the box hedge in the garden, as if something had brushed along against it? Then Buddie's stiffening relaxed, and he smiled at the inky blackness overhead. Cats, most likely. He would roll over on the other side and go to sleep.

Nevertheless, he accomplished his rolling over, usually a noisy process on that crackling roof, with an utter stillness that vied with the silence of the night around him. Instead of going back to sleep, as he had intended, though, he found himself wider awake than ever, his senses even more alert. Not that he was at all nervous, he assured himself valiantly. He was only wondering what cats were doing there in paths so usually guarded by Ebenezer's watchful eye.

Far off across the darkness, a dog barked lustily. Another, near at hand, replied, and others still took up the chorus. Buddie wondered a little that Ebenezer did not join, and start a fugue upon his own account; but Ebenezer's peaceful snores and gurglings went on, unbroken. Then the canine chorus died away, to be replaced by a quiet so intense, so absolute, that perforce Buddie's nerves

grew quiet with it, and sleep came creeping back again towards his drowsy eyes.

Towards, but not into, them. With a snap, he was wide awake once more, every nerve and muscle taut with expectation. What was that rustle in the grass? That snapping of a twig? That faint, faint whimper of the gravel, as one pebble ground against the surface of another? That was no cat. It was by far too painstaking in its extreme deliberation.

Buddie's first impulse was to sit up and look about him. Then he remembered that he could see absolutely nothing in such darkness; and that any stir he made would probably set the roof to crackling beneath him, and so frighten away the prowler, beast, or human. And Buddie had no wish to frighten him away — yet. That might come later, Buddie admitted candidly to himself. For the present, though, he was a good deal more interested in finding out what manner of prowler it might be, than in frightening him away. For the time being, curiosity far outweighed fear. Besides, it would be impossible to thrill Eric with a story that stopped short at its beginning, instead of working up and up to the thrilling climax Fate had destined for it. Properly developed, even a cat might have a climax, but not a human visitor who merely creaked a little and then went his way. Buddie lay still and listened, alert for what should happen next.

For quite a long time, it seemed to him that nothing would happen next. Save for the usual petty noises of the night, the stillness was unbroken, and, to Buddie's rage, he felt sleep creeping over him again. It would have been most ignominious

to have gone to sleep in such a crisis as the one which instinctively he felt he faced; and yet his eyes grew heavy and his brain grew dull increasingly. In vain he twined his legs into uncomfortable knots; in vain he twisted his ear and bit the ends of all his fingers. The ignominious fact would not be downed; he was almost asleep, and, within a minute or two, unless something happened, he would be quite so. He fell to chewing his thumb remorselessly.

And then, all at once, something did happen, a whisper, low, but sounding clear in the thick black stillness of the night.

"Shall we try it now, Jim?"

"Right? Are you ready?"

"Yep. Got your little namesake?"

"O. K. It's the narrow window, right ahead of us."

Forgetful of the rights of his thumb to be considered, Buddie shut his teeth upon it with a violence which nearly forced a cry out of him against his will. The narrow window was the one just underneath him, a window of the closet where Miss Julia kept the little safe that held the silver. And the servants' wing was quite at the other side of the house; its windows opened, not upon the garden, but on the bit of lawn that faced the now deserted stables and the icehouse. If this sudden realization at the first gave Buddie just a little pang, the pang swiftly was forgotten in the proud knowledge that on him alone rested the protection of all this end of the house. It was his chance. If only Ebenezer would not wake up and spoil it all! His chance! But how in the world should he meet it? Heroes, as a rule, did not go forth to conquest, clad in flannel

sleeping suits and girded with a scarlet blanket. A burglar, for this unmistakably was a burglar and, on his own confession, armed with the conventional jimmy of his calling, a burglar need not be too stout-hearted not to quail at such a vision as Buddie instinctively realized that he was doomed to present. Awful if, instead of fleeing, the burglar should turn on him and trounce him, and spank him with the jimmy! From such an anticlimax, Buddie felt he must guard himself at almost any cost.

But the whispering kept on. It was nearer now, yet so much more low that Buddie, strain his ears as he would, could catch only an occasional word.

"Then while I front lawn."

" signal."

" in at the window out "

"Get done ready?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"In case a dog "

"Shoot "

Buddie felt his anger rising until he came near to choking with it. Shoot Ebenezer! Never! He would shoot them first, both of them, and dead! Ebenezer! His anger grew, but without the slightest fear. Ebenezer was shut up in his room, and safe. Even if he waked and growled a little, he was out of range of their shots. They were in range, though, and — A new thought struck him, and with a regret. If only he could get at his rifle, Teresa's rifle, now hanging on the wall above his table! He would show them what it was to shoot. Had n't the West Pointer complimented him, only last week, upon his marksmanship? Of course, it never had occurred

to him before that a man was a fair target; but a burglar was a different matter, especially a burglar who uttered threats concerning Ebenezer. Buddie's fingers itched to get at his gun. If ever a boy scout had a plain duty, it was now, when Miss Julia and Miss Julia's safe were alike defenceless, alike dependent upon him.

The gun, though, was inside his room. For all practical purposes, it might as well have been in the heart of mountainous Thibet. It would be impossible to get it, without making all sorts of a racket. Of course, that would scare away the burglar; and, by now, Buddie's fighting blood was up. The broken bit of threat concerning Ebenezer had made him thirstful, not for safety for himself and the house, but for capture, for taking the man red-handed, jimmy and all. But how could one achieve it, perched on a clattery tin roof, armed only with a scarlet blanket and a pillow? Of course, there was the knife, still clutched in his left hand. It had one very big blade, and a saw and a corkscrew; but in order to get full benefit of its resources, one would be obliged to come to closer quarters than Buddie felt his flannel sleeping suit could justify.

He listened again. The whispering had ceased entirely. In place of it, he could make out the rustle of steps, two sets of steps, the one moving softly out towards the front lawn, the other creeping stealthily to the narrow window just underneath his room. Indeed, the corner of his room and the corner of the closet into which the narrow window opened formed the outer angle of the house, the angle against which came the wide verandah and the wide tin roof. By creeping, creeping noiselessly to the very edge of

the roof, then, and by peering down from above the rail, it might be possible, even in the thick darkness, to get a glimpse of the intruder at his work, and to discover what manner of man he was, what sort of an antagonist, given close quarters, he would prove to be.

Buddie's manhood throbbed within him at the thought. Something else throbbed within him, too: a keen desire to see the jimmy. He could plan up so much better fight, if only he could get the faintest notion of what a jimmy really was. The name sounded harmless; but names were misleading now and then, as he knew to his cost. Anyway, no harm in finding out. With care, he could slide down to the rail, without making a breath of noise. Of course, if the roof crackled, it would all be up. However, if he knew himself, the roof would not crackle, not if he were Buddie Angell and a scout, not if he had to take his bed along with him to muffle the sound.

And take his bed along with him, Buddie did. By dint of lying still and stiff, and pushing and pulling with his two hands against every projection of the window casing at his side, Buddie contrived to slide himself, bed and all, quite noiselessly down to the edge of the roof. There, kneeling up in the thick darkness, he leaned over the rail and peered down. Something blacker than the darkness was moving below the window, something large and strong —

There came the flash of a small electric searchlight from below. It showed the man the outlines of the window; but it also showed Buddie the outlines of the man. And the man was most deliberately making his preparations to force his way into Miss Julia's

house. Buddie, above, went quite beside himself with rage at the sight.

Up to that instant, Buddie had formed no plan of action. From point to point of his way, he had gone on, careless, fearless, quite unreasoning. Now, all at once, his reasoning came back to him, and, with his reasoning, a plan, safe, crafty, sure as any plan might be in such an emergency as that, and, withal, not without its share of fun. Quicker than words could have been spoken, Buddie dropped the knife, and it fell upon the bed quite silently. Then, catching up his pillow, he bent above the rail and, with the skill born of half an hundred pillow-fights with Daddy, he hurled it down full upon the unsuspecting burglar underneath. The pillow was heavy, the blow was neatly given and the burglar was totally unprepared for being smitten down thus heavily and apparently from heaven. As a natural result, he fell in an inglorious heap upon the ground, while the searchlight, falling from his hand, turned about completely and came to rest with its cone of light directly in his eyes, dazzling him too completely to allow him to see at once what a thing it was which had bowled him over. Before the dazzle had left his eyes, moreover, he found himself enveloped in thick, soft, heavy darkness. Buddie had followed up the pillow with a scarlet blanket, flapping it down upon his foe so cunningly that it smothered him completely, and left him swaddled, hand and foot.

Only an instant afterward, Buddie's fingers had shut once more upon the knife, had jerked it open. Trigger-like, its blade snapped once, twice. Then, in the roughest, deepest voice which he could drag out of his fourteen-year-old body, Buddie shouted

out into the night his threatening statement of the literal, inglorious truth, —

"I've got you covered, you villain! Hands up, or you're a goner!"

The next minute, Ebenezer's deep-mouthed bark summoned the servants to make fast Buddie's prostrate captive.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THE RIFLE MATCH

PLOP! Plop! Plop!

Miss Julia's barn, long unused and now converted into a rifle range, echoed with the popping of miniature rifles, echoed, too, with the occasional applause which arose from the top of the grain bin in the corner. All the rest of the inner arrangements of the barn had been torn away: stalls, harness closets and the long, long racks for the mows which, in the old days when the Tenney place had been the Tenney farm, had been heaped to the very rafters overhead. Only the grain bin had been left intact. This had been at the suggestion of Buddie who had seen in its covers the possibility of a visitors' gallery. Of course, the scouts were bound to have visitors, lots of them. Miss Julia might as well make provision for them, first as last. Accordingly, the grain bin had been spared. Furthermore, it had been equipped with a step ladder and a dozen folding canvas chairs.

"That's enough," Buddie had insisted. "We can't have all creation coming in here to look on. Only the people who have fellows in the scouts can come, and they will think any amount more of us, if we make them wait their turn."

In this decision, Buddie showed his wisdom. It

is the treasure which is buried deepest that one covets most of all.

The barn had been the latest of Miss Julia's many contributions to the scouts. Miss Julia, by now, was becoming almost more enthusiastic over the scout idea than were the boys themselves. The training of the youngsters to feel that reverence for their country demanded something else from them than the mere sentimental saluting of the flag; that she asked of them the making themselves into honest, loyal men, strong and clean-minded, and yet very gentle; that she asked them to be ready to come actively to her defence in case of need: all this seemed to Miss Julia to be very much worth while.

She had believed in the idea from the start; her belief had been vastly strengthened, though, by her going to New York, soon after her return from the lake, to meet the great commander who had given birth to the idea, and, over an informal dinner table, to hear him plead its cause, not as America would make it, but according to his simple British notion. Miss Julia came back from New York, next day, half dazed by the humming of the score of new ideas within her brain. The next day after, she had sent for the retired West Pointer, and had spent the afternoon, discussing with him the most pressing needs of the boy scouts. Two days later, an energetic group of carpenters were pulling down the dusty haymows in the barn.

The place would do admirably, the West Pointer agreed. In fact, nothing could do better. Now that the cold weather was so near at hand, the boys must think of giving up their out-door drill. Besides, the rifles had been there, more than a week, and —

the West Pointer laughed a little at his own confession — and it seemed to him rather dangerous to let the boys have target practise in the public streets or even in his own back yard. Miss Julia's barn was huge, wide enough, and very long, after the old fashion which demanded that a barn should be large enough to hold two loaded hay wagons and their horses at the same time. If Miss Julia really felt that she could give it up —

And Miss Julia really did. For many years, the old barn had been nothing but a catch-all for the overflow from the house. She would have it cleared out at once. Indeed, she telephoned to her contractor on the instant. And the contractor, being a Nova Scotian and honest, kept his promises and fell to work, not two days afterward.

After all, though, there was not much for him to do. The old racks and cross-beams must be cleared away, the stalls pulled out, and the harness room. Then, with a new floor put down above the old one, with a coat of paint above the dust of ages, and with a dozen new windows and a grand new stove, the boy scouts' drill shed was complete and ready for instant service. Meanwhile, the West Pointer had been busy with the Powers That Be, in preparation for a small surprise of his own making.

On the last afternoon in September, Miss Julia invited the scouts to come in at three to inspect their winter quarters. At half-past two, that very afternoon, an expressman dumped three huge wooden boxes on the floor of the new drill shed. When the last one of the boys had straggled in, and when the chorus of approval had died away to an occasional random word, the West Pointer came down the

floor, a hammer in the one hand, a chisel in the other.

"Captain," he said to Buddie; "I rather think it's up to you to open those boxes."

Buddie, looking a trifle dazed, a trifle upset, too, at having this menial task thrown on his dignity, drew back a little. Then, because in reality the West Pointer was his commanding officer, and because his scout's oath had entailed obedience; and also because the West Pointer was not strong, and because his oath also had entailed assistance to the weak, Buddie took the hammer and the chisel, and fell to work.

At first, he was more than a little awkward. The task took all of his strength, and would easily have taken twice his skill, had he possessed it. Moreover, the suggestions and the irreverent comments of the other boys did little towards the steadying of his hand. Finally, however, the corner of the first box yielded a little, the nails sighed as they loosened, and a long, splintery board slowly rose up at one end. An instant later, Buddie had given a whoop of utter rapture and, his dignity and his aching back alike forgotten, he fell upon the next board with a right good will. Why? Merely because the loosened board had brought up with it the wrapping paper underneath, and, through the paper's crack, Buddie's keen eyes had discovered the gleam of bright brass buttons against a bed of dull brown khaki wool. It was not until a good while later that the enraptured scouts became aware that, down at the farther end of the barn, their commandant was busy fastening a row of targets to the iron-sheathed wall.

As a matter of course, the scouts would gladly

have given all their daylight hours to drill and rifle practise, in the next few weeks. The West Pointer, though, was far too wise to allow that. He had been a boy, himself, not so many years ago; he knew just how quickly any flame, left to itself, can burn itself out to cold, cold ashes. Accordingly, after taking counsel with Miss Julia and finding her almost as excited and impatient as the boys, he took the matter entirely into his own hands and laid down the rules as he judged wisest. Enthusiasm was a good thing, granted it was lasting. However, it would be fatal to the whole boy scout idea, if his boys, once they had their rifles and their uniforms and a proper drill shed, should wear out their interest in a week or two, and abandon their company before it was half trained. The West Pointer spent a long, long evening in his room, a calendar before him, but his eyes turned backward on his own boyhood and the things that had helped him most to become the captain that he was now, at twenty-nine. Boys were not all alike. Still, they had had all sorts to deal with at the Point. Perchance more than one of the old rules would hold good here.

Next day, he astounded Buddie by the rules he had laid down. At first, the astonishment had to do with the exceedingly small number of them. Later, as Buddie came to know them better, his astonishment increased that they should cover so much ground. As for the details of drill and rifle practise, they were summed up in tersest phrase: absolute obedience to the officer of the day.

The drill, to the regret of all the boys, was limited to two afternoons a week. After every drill, and for an hour on Saturday mornings, there would be target

shooting. This was to last until, in mid November, there was to be a preliminary sort of competition. Of course, there would be a small cup; but the main object would be the sorting them out into squads for more individual training. Afterwards, each week, there would be one drill, one day for rifle practise for each separate squad. By spring, they would be ready to have an exhibition drill and rifle match; in the meantime, it was to be work, not frills.

From the first, Buddie proved himself to be a born marksman. He took no especial pains, it seemed, to hit the target. He merely blazed away, and let his shot go where it pleased. As a general rule, it pleased to go straight at the bull's-eye. Indeed, had the captaincy of the scouts still been vacant, Buddie would have received the office by the unanimous vote of the boys, who delighted in his happy-go-lucky fashion of sending his shots home.

Next to Buddie in success came Eric Hamilton. Eric, however, was the exact opposite of Buddie, in the way he went about his shooting. He used up a good ten minutes, every time he started to take aim; he put his finger on the trigger and withdrew it a good ten times, before he finally could bring himself to shoot. His face, meanwhile, even apart from the conventional squint of sighting, was wrinkled and drawn with his anxious care. To Eric's earnest mind, the scouts were no mere social club, scouting no bit of sport to be taken lightly. Indeed, it was Eric's way to take nothing lightly, not even the funny column of the daily paper, Sandy's daily joy. As for an organization that wore real uniforms and burned real powder and concerned one's country and one's honour: that was surely an object to be

taken in all seriousness. And Eric gripped his rifle all the tighter, by way of giving his seriousness full play.

To watch Eric at his shooting was a joy apart from all things else in life. Beside him, prone upon his stomach, Buddie, as has been stated, blazed away at random and in the hottest sort of haste. Eric, meanwhile, knelt down with great deliberation, the sort of deliberation that one generally associates with gouty knees. Then, from his knees, he carefully lowered himself to the ground where, as a rule, he landed at about the moment that Buddie was putting his final shot. And then the sightings, the puckering his anxious face into sinister knots the better to regulate his vision, the uncertain hovering of his finger near the trigger, and then the final shutting of his teeth which accompanied the shot! After that, the accuracy of his marksmanship seemed almost a negligible quantity, by force of contrast.

Buddie himself praised Eric without stint. As for himself, he had gone into it because Daddy had written to him that it was the decent thing to do, and because, doing it, he had found it, oath and all, the greatest sort of fun. He liked to do it well, because it was in him to like anything done well. As for being the best marksman of them all, he did n't care a pin-prick. Buddie took his sports absolutely for themselves, not for the sake of the cups they might, or might not, carry with them. However, he was shrewd enough to discover, quite early in the game, that with Eric it was altogether different. Eric took some comfort out of the fact that he was Buddie's only worthy rival. None the less, Eric's comfort was flawed by the prompt discovery that it would be the very bluest sort of a blue moon, before

he could rank himself as Buddie's equal. Besides, even as it was, Buddie was not half trying. If he were — Eric shook his head until his flaxen hair well-nigh lost its wonted curl, forward from behind his ears.

October saw the rifle practise well under way, saw the enthusiasm of the boys mount high and ever higher, saw the whole number of the boy scouts slowly divide into just two classes. One class held Eric and Buddie; the other class held all the others. And, as October waned and November waxed to the preliminary competition, the others, despite their keen enthusiasm, were quite content to stand by, their rifles grounded, and watch the closer rivalry between their irresponsible young captain and his anxious, careful subordinate. Moreover, some vague notion of allegiance to their oaths made the scouts see to it that their applause should depend solely on the skill of the marksman, and not upon his personal popularity.

Miss Julia was a frequent visitor in the drill shed, whenever the target practise was going on. Weeks since, she and the West Pointer had become the closest sort of friends, for a hobby ridden in common can prance across all manner of differences of age, or training, or of social ties. Together, all that autumn, the two of them had had great discussions, first over the organization and equipment of the scouts, then over the individual scouts themselves. The West Pointer had been a boy; Miss Julia possessed the woman's keener intuition. Taken together, their combined insight made them quick to see the boyish good that only needed better soil in which to grow, the boyish faults that, wisely pruned and grafted, could be made over into virtues

of the strongest, soundest sort. But, wherever their discussions started, invariably they came back to the one end: the curious contrast between Buddie and Eric, the brilliant, erratic possibilities of the one, the steadfast, plodding promise of the other. As to which of them would be the better man, they held their peace. The West Pointer thought he knew; Miss Julia knew she did.

Meanwhile, as November came and the day of the trial match was near at hand, poor Teresa was waxing well-nigh hysterical. It was an open secret among all the boys that the winning score would lie between Buddie and Eric. Teresa, therefore felt herself terribly torn between her two allegiances. Buddie was her chosen chum and crony; but Eric was her brother. Teresa was not a close student of her native tongue; it did not occur to her that, by the use of *but* instead of *and* in that connection, she was throwing impartiality to the four winds of heaven. Instead, she honestly believed that she had no choice at all between the two contestants; and it was with a lusty determination to hold fast to her impartiality that she clambered up upon the grain bin, when the great day of the match had come.

The old barn, that afternoon, was steeped in yellow sunshine. For the one day, the violet haze of the Indian summer had vanished utterly. Outside the eastern windows of the barn, a row of hickory trees caught the clear sunshine of the afternoon and flung it back, all golden, across the drill shed floor; while the direct sunbeams came striking in through the west windows, to fall straight and true upon the row of targets hung to the southern wall.

The grain bin was at the northern end, and crowded to its utmost capacity. Every one of the dozen chairs was taken by an excited parent, and seven or eight sisters, loyal to the point of fightiness, sat ranged along the edge and pounded applause with their ecstatic heels, until the empty grain bin rumbled an appreciative echo to every shot that *plopped* across the expectant silence.

Down on the floor at everybody's feet lay the marksmen, flat on their stomachs, regardless of the effect upon the glory of their uniforms. And, even greater glory, their speckless, burnished rifles gleamed in their hands, emblem of true war and victory, lustrous as was the loyalty of the boyish hearts against which they were cuddled. And always, one and one and one, the rifles barked their sharp and sudden note, and the white targets at the other end dotted themselves with flecks and blurs of black.

Teresa held her breath and nestled a bit closer to Miss Julia's feet. The West Pointer had given the order to cease firing, while he changed the targets and cried out the scores. Buddie was in the lead, far, far in the lead. After him came Eric, as a matter of course. After Eric, a long way after, came Sandy, and then two others in a tie.

Again the West Pointer's whistle.

"Begin firing," he said tersely.

Again there came the firing, and again it ceased. This time, the score was changing. Sandy was left far in the lurch. Eric, meanwhile, had gained on Buddie steadily.

Once more there came the whistle and the rain of *plops*. Teresa, in her excitement, was gripping the edge of the grain bin with both hands. Eric's

face, what could be seen of it between the puckerings, was growing grim, and his yellow hair lay wet across his forehead. Buddie, his face a picture of blithe unconcern, was emptying his rifle into the very bull's-eye and, to all seeming, not caring a snap for his success. However, Miss Julia, listening to the calling of the score, the final score but one, did care intensely. Buddie had nearly doubled his lead over Eric. As for the others, so far as Miss Julia was concerned, they did not count at all.

It seemed to all the audience upon the grain bin that the West Pointer was very slow, that time, in putting up the fresh set of targets. Teresa banged her heels and whispered to the girl beside her. Miss Julia tied knots in the fringe of her Liberty scarf, while she tried her best to seem bored. The other mothers and sisters fidgetted and looked anxious. Buddie, meanwhile, flat on his stomach still, was chaffing the boy beside him as unconcernedly as if, to all appearing, the cup and the accompanying applause were not already won. Eric, on his knees at the other end of the firing squad, was very white and still.

The whistle sounded. Buddie, as he dropped, cast a glance across the intervening backs. He saw the white, set face of his one rival and interpreted it with boyish comprehension of the crisis and what it meant to each of them.

"Begin firing!"

Plop! Plop! Plop! Plop!

But something was the matter with Buddie, something sudden, and ominous of what the end might be. Was he ill, or nervous, or had that sudden, mocking glance across the line destroyed his mental

grasp upon the target? His first shot went wild, the second wilder. The remaining shots went after them. Miss Julia caught her breath in consternation, held it in horror. Had Buddie, the irresponsible, the un-self-conscious, succumbed at the last minute to stage fright? Eric, on the other hand, had steadied down to the final business, and was putting shot after shot home in a fashion Buddie, earlier, might well have envied. Nevertheless, for some reason or other, Teresa neglected to applaud. And, meanwhile, as the shots went on, Eric's brow was increasingly anxious; but Buddie's smile was almost fatuous.

After it was all over, and Eric, in the middle of the floor, was showing off the cup to an admiring circle, Buddie vaulted up on top of the grain bin and squatted down beside Miss Julia's chair.

"Awful sorry you are disappointed, Aunt Julia," he said, and, as he spoke, the smile still curved his lips, but an odd little light, graver and full of some unuttered thought, came into his brown eyes. "The fact of it is, I must have been badly rattled, to go to pieces as I did. Still," he added nonchalantly, while his fingers shut on the fringe of her dangling scarf; "a good deal of fun has been coming my way, lately, with the Bishop and the burglar and all the rest of them, so perhaps it's only fair for Eric to get his innings, just this once."

And Miss Julia, listening, feeling the little confidential tugging of the scarf fringe, came to the swift conclusion that the mere winning of a silver loving cup counted a great deal less than did some other things.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### EBENEZER MAKES GOOD

ONE evening, only about a week after Buddie had lost — or won — the prize at the rifle competition, the playhouse was the scene of a festivity hitherto unparallelled in its existence. Out from the windows, set wide open to the warm Indian summer night, candles flared across the darkness, and the fragrance of good soup and roasting meat was wafted on the evening breeze. Indeed, by all signs, it was manifest that a dinner party of some consequence was going on inside.

Quite as a matter of course, Teresa was the hostess. The guests were only two, Miss Julia and Buddie, with Sandy as an extra to fill up the table, to eat up the undesirable pieces and to help in the serving. However, it was Miss Julia who was the real guest of honour. It had been in a spirit of humility, though, that Teresa had proffered the invitation.

"Would you really, Miss Julia? I'd love it. And we had such a splendid time together at the lake, you know. This time, I want to feel that you are my very own guest, so that we can talk it all over."

Miss Julia had accepted with a genuine enthusiasm which, only the year before, would have been totally unknown to her in any such connection.

Moreover, she paid Teresa the compliment of putting on one of her prettiest frocks, and wearing the intricate necklace of silver and turquoises which, Teresa had told her at the lake, always made her look like a girl just ready to be entering college.

As a matter of necessity, the dinner was on a Saturday evening. Only a whole holiday would have given Teresa time to sweep and garnish the playhouse inside and out, to scrub Rosa's elderly countenance and launder at least the outer layers of her clothing, and to cook the dinner to which, the past few days, she had given hours and hours of planning. If Miss Julia was dainty, Buddie was critical, and, as it chanced, this was to be Buddie's first meal in the playhouse. Teresa made up her mind that it should be her own fault, though, if it were the last. There would be soup and a salad and, of course, the roast meat and vegetables which go to the making of any dinner. Mrs. Hamilton had been wise in offering advice. Together, she and Teresa had planned a pudding that would be all the better, made the day before, and together the two of them had vetoed anything else beside the cheese.

If Mrs. Hamilton felt any undue elation over her young daughter's housewifery, Teresa never knew it. She did know, though, that on occasions such as this, she could count upon her mother's advice and encouragement; still more, could count upon it that her mother would protect her from any unsolicited visitations from the boys.

All day long, Teresa toiled and moiled. Then, when the house was all in order; when the dinner was ready, all but its final touches, she skurried

across to the house to put on her best array. Nothing was too good for Miss Julia, who would be putting in her appearance at the playhouse, now, at almost any minute. It was a sleek and shining Teresa who, a bit later, opened the playhouse door to greet her guests, as sleek and shining as herself.

Contrary to the rule which governs the quality of almost all the dinners served by such young hostesses in real life, and of literally all in fiction, Teresa's dinner was a grand success from end to end. Sugared, not salted, meat, and a wheyed pudding may create mirth in the heart of the rank outsider; but also it creates discomfort in the heart of the hostess and in the stomach of the courteous guest. Upon that account alone, Teresa's rich, hot soup, her beef done to a turn and her good pudding deserve the more credit. Miss Julia's praise was the result of honest conviction, not of courtesy; and Buddie's all-devouring appetite bore out the testimony of Miss Julia's praise. As for Sandy, he had had his instructions. His function was to make the table balance properly and to eat up gratefully whatever was put upon his plate. His comments, however, were all to be reserved until some other time.

Indian summer lingered late, that year. The day had been like a bit of belated summer, hot and hazy in the midday sun. The evening was almost as warm, so warm, in fact, that the playhouse, heated by the fire for roasting meat, seemed like an oven, and Teresa accordingly had opened the windows wide, wide to the mellow night. November though it was, only the faintest breeze came in, fluttering the muslin curtains, stirring the lace at Miss Julia's

throat, setting the candles to winking and then to dancing under their scarlet shades, and then going to lift the crisp white skirt of the venerable Rosa who sat smiling at them from her own old willow chair. Teresa had put her there on purpose, moving the shabby chair from its wonted place beside the stove into a corner of the living-room where old Rosa could look on and hear the talk without getting in the way. Rosa was one of her very oldest friends. It was not quite loyal to leave her in the kitchen among the pots and kettles, when such a gala scene as this was taking place across the threshhold. Teresa had put her there of a set purpose. It did not surprise Teresa in the least when Miss Julia, with a short word or two, showed that she understood that purpose.

All around the playhouse, the trees upon the lawn were quite bare by now. The breeze came in across them so silently that one could overhear the faintest sounds upon the night outside, could overhear them, that is, when Buddie's fun and Miss Julia's charming chatter left any space for a pause to creep in. Far off, a dog was fussing and fretting on his chain; and, every now and then, Ebenezer, over on Miss Julia's lawn, barked back at him encouragingly. Once, too, in the anxious pause which accompanied the first dip of the spoon into the pudding, they could hear, from the Hamilton house, a sound of strife, and of soft, thick blows as of immature, unsteady fists descending on a blanket-covered body. That was all, and that, curiously enough, only enhanced their sense of comfort.

Buddie, his pudding half devoured, lifted his head and bestowed a languishing smile upon Teresa.

"I say, this is great," he told her. "Why the mischief have n't you done it before?"

"How did I know you'd care about it?" she retorted.

"Don't fish," Buddie admonished her. "Don't I always come, when you whistle? Besides, this has the added attraction of the eats. All in all, it's the best fun I've had since the circus."

"Except the scouts," she reminded him. "Have a little more pudding, while you meditate on your happiness."

Buddie passed his plate to her. Then he turned to face his aunt.

"By the way, Aunt Julia, I forgot to tell you; but there's an awful row on in the scouts."

Miss Julia looked uneasy. Jealousies were bound to develop, she knew. Still, she had not looked for them to crop up so soon.

"What is wrong, Buddie?" she inquired.

Buddie's answer was short and all-embracing.

"Everything." Then he fell to upon his second supply of pudding.

"But what?"

Buddie had theories regarding the sort of people who talk with their mouths full. Therefore there came an interval of struggle, before he answered.

"A man has come out from town to tell Captain Paddock," Paddock was the name of the West Pointer — "that he does n't know much, and that he's started us on a wrong tack. It seems he's aping the British," the quote-marks fairly bristled upon Buddie's tongue; "and all our drill and target practise is n't in it."

Miss Julia smiled. She had heard similar talk

before. Undoubtedly, there was truth upon both sides. Therefore she saw no reason to cavil at the good work and the equally good enthusiasm which the West Pointer had been putting into the one thing he knew best how to do. If others were willing to work on other lines, let them come out and work, not stand on one side and offer criticisms.

"What then, Buddie?" she asked him calmly.

"Oh, he says we are n't meant to fight at all. We must go out and run races, and build fires with two sticks, and know the names of the stars, and be able to find our way back home," Buddie made detailed answer.

Teresa waved her spoon in the air.

"That all, Buddie?"

"No; there's lots more. We must bandage up people who have their heads cut off, and we must know the telegraph alphabet, and how to cook a 'sinker.'"

"What's that?"

Buddie cast a glance about the dainty table, by way of driving home his compliment.

"Nothing that you know anything about, Teresa," he told her blandly.

She nodded her gratitude. Then, —

"But what does Captain Paddock say?" she asked him.

"He does n't say; he just looks hurt and talks about resigning. He won't, though. I'll get the boys together, after school on Monday, and I think we can put it into his head that either he stays, or the whole scout business goes up in smoke."

Miss Julia smiled in swift approval.

"You'll never get a better commandant," she said.

Her words set Buddie off upon another grievance.

"That's another thing that's wrong. We ought n't to have a captain, nor anything like that. He must be a scout-master. And our uniforms are wrong. They ought to be more sloppy, and we should wear our stockings turned down at the knees, and a handkerchief tied around our necks, like a blooming farmer."

Miss Julia felt it her unwelcome duty to offer protest.

"*Blooming* is a forbidden word, Buddie, and farmers are respectable," she admonished him.

"Yes; but they are n't stylish. Besides, they do make things bloom; now don't they?" Buddie argued. "But honestly, Aunt Julia, it was a shame to come here and upset everything we've done. It is n't decent to Captain Paddock."

Sandy suddenly broke silence, thickly, by reason of his pudding.

"It's a pesky pity!" he observed. Then once more he fell into silence and upon his plate of pudding.

Buddie, though, instead of disposing of the situation in a phrase, felt himself inclined to keep on arguing.

"Daddy wanted me to go into it, as much for the drill as anything — except, of course, the oath and being manly and all that. Daddy believes in drill. He says it makes us have good, strong bodies, and keeps our brains going, and makes us mind, whether we like or not. It's the same way with the target shooting. It makes us know the difference between almost getting there, and quite. We don't have to go out and lick the Japanese, because we know the

drill; and we need n't shoot Pet-Lamb, just because we know enough to hit a target. Anyhow, Captain Paddock has given all this summer and fall to — Hullo! What in thunder is ailing Ebenezer?"

To all seeming, Ebenezer was scouting on his own account, and having troubles of his own, the while he scouted. Across the quiet Indian summer breeze and cutting in upon the phrase of Buddie, there came a short, sharp bark, another bark, and then a veritable torrent of remonstrance. Buddie lifted up his head, and at the same time, his voice.

"Ebenezer, be still!" he said; and the china dishes throbbed and thrilled with the volume of his tones.

For the space of five whole minutes, Ebenezer was still.

"Cats," Buddie explained, in the interval. "Well, as I was saying, we boys are going to have a meeting, Monday, in the barn. When we have talked the matter up a little, we're going to send to Captain Paddock to come down, and then we're going to tell him just what we think of him, and what we mean to do."

"And that?" Miss Julia queried.

"Is to keep on, just the way we're doing. If they don't like us to keep up the name of scouts, we'll change, and call ourselves Paddock's Rifles. Anyhow, it's up to them to —" Again the echoes woke. "Ebenezer! Be still!" Then Buddie ended tranquilly, "to stop us, if they can."

But Ebenezer, lacking the proper training of a scout, showed himself mutinous and disregarded orders utterly. He not only would not be still; but he increased the volume and the volubility of his remonstrances. He barked until his breath failed

him, and then he took to growling until such time as, his vocal cords a little rested, he could resume his more audible comments upon the situation. Whatever the situation might be, moreover, it was plain that it displeased Ebenezer, displeased him increasingly. It was equally plain, also, that Ebenezer was viewing the situation from all sides. His voice came, now from the verandah, now from the front gate, now from the shrubberies beside the path. Then, all at once, it jumped back to the front verandah, jumped back there and remained, while the night silence was torn and tattered with his resonant objections. No mere mortal cat, it seemed, could have been sufficiently bulky and persistent to have aroused so great a storm of defiance from a dog of Ebenezer's jovial temperament.

"What can it be, Buddie?" Miss Julia asked him rather timorously, for her nerves had been a good deal shaken by the attempted burglary of a month before. "Something must be wrong."

Buddie chuckled.

"Anyhow, Ebenezer thinks there is," he answered. "Wait a minute, though, till I can make him hear. I want to call him off. There's no especial sense in his making such a row as that."

"Go out and see what's the matter," Teresa suggested.

Buddie shrugged his shoulders.

"Not if I know myself," he said. "I'm having much too good a time inside, and there's one more heap of clean little plates, over there on that side table. I propose to see this thing through."

"Apparently so does Ebenezer," Teresa said flippantly, as she rose at Buddie's obvious hint and

prepared the table for the clean little plates that had caught his eye.

"But really, Buddie, I am afraid —"

"Ebenezer is n't, Aunt Julia," he reassured her, with a careless laugh. "After all, that's the main thing to be considered. He sounds like a bold and raging lion, ready to eat up anything from a pussy-cat to a gigantic miscreant."

Teresa giggled.

"He'd eat up anything at all. I never saw such an appetite," she said. "It's worse than Sandy's."

Sandy aroused himself from dreamy contemplation of his scraped-up plate.

"Oh, come now!" he protested.

"I'm coming. Really, Buddie, I begin to be a little anxious for fear Ebenezer will split his throat. He's actually hoarse, with so much barking. Run out and see what's the trouble, there's a dear."

But Buddie's eye had caught sight of the something evidently destined to be eaten on the clean little plates.

"Pish! Tush! By and by, Teresa," he said indolently.

Once again Sandy spoke, this time malignly.

"'Fraid?" he queried briefly.

Buddie pushed back his chair with absolute decision.

"Not. I'm not made like that," he said. "Here goes. Don't eat everything up, while I am gone."

But Miss Julia had risen also.

"I think I'll go with you, Buddie."

"Nonsense, Aunt Julia! What's the use?"

Her smile was a little bit uncertain.

"No use; it's only more sociable. Besides, Bud-

die, I really think that something must be wrong."

Then her heart warmed at his tone of elderly protection, the while he flung his arm around her waist.

"All the more reason you should n't go, Aunt Julia. That's what I'm for, you know, to see you through things."

Nevertheless, in the end Miss Julia did go, too. Moreover, Teresa rebelled and refused to be left behind with Sandy, who remained to guard — and garner in — the final goodies of the feast. Accordingly, after a brief period of objection on the part of Buddie, of argument and protest upon that of Teresa and Miss Julia, the three of them set forth upon their tour of investigation. Buddie, to all seeming, was entirely unconcerned; Teresa's long yellow pigtails, though, were quivering with suppressed excitement, with feverish anticipations, even with hopes that once again it would prove to be a real burglar, so that now she herself could have a share in the fun of his capture. Between them walked Miss Julia, her long silk gown caught up and wound about her, her head held high above her turquoise necklace which brought the pink into her cheeks, the clearer light into her brown eyes. Whatever the past history of the possible intruder, it seemed to Teresa that it could have held in it the meeting with few more gracious and attractive women than Miss Julia, few more indomitable in their haughty pride.

Ebenezer's troubles, meanwhile, appeared to be increasing. To judge from the sound, he had left the verandah once more, and was now upon the gravel walk that led down across the lawn to the front gate. At first, this was only manifested by the

changed direction of his voice. Then, as the trio, silent and treading cautiously, drew nearer, they could make out, between the barking, the grinding of the gravel, the low growls of Ebenezer which were punctuated, every now and then, by the unmistakable sound of rending woollens and, occasionally and very faint, a human sort of noise, half sigh, half something infinitely more profane. And then the barking arose once more, and drowned all other noises in its furious sound.

With the coming of the night, the haze had settled down more thickly. It blotted out the stars completely. The front of the house was all in darkness, by reason of Miss Julia's absence, and the street lamp was quite too far away to throw any light upon the scene. Nevertheless, as the three of them came nearer, they could make out the stiff, taut figure of a man, an abnormally tall man he looked to be in the darkness. Hanging to his rearmost folds of clothing and shaking them madly now and then, so madly that the tall man shook with them as shakes the reed when the beaver passes by: hanging to the extreme rear of his clothing, Ebenezer, his paws thrust hard into the gravel and the whole weight of his great gray body and his powerful jaws bent to the task of holding the intruder from entering the house in the absence of its mistress.

Buddie's quick eye was the first one to make out the situation. Clear and sharp across the night rang out his voice.

"Hold him, Ebenezer! Good boy! Hang on!"

"Oh, Buddie!" Miss Julia's hand shut on his elbow. "It is another burglar, or a sneak thief. What if he is armed?"

"He can't get at Ebenezer," Buddie reassured her.

"No," Miss Julia responded, with unanswerable truth; "but he can get at us." Then, of a sudden, she apparently resolved to forestall that danger, and her voice rang out in shrill encouragement. "Eat him up, Ebenezer! Sic 'em! Ebenezer, eat him up, all up!"

And Ebenezer's yowl of comprehension, flung forth from between his clenched jaws, assured Miss Julia that he would do his doggish best to carry out her orders.

But man proposes, and sometimes something else disposes of his propositions.

Ebenezer's comprehending assent was followed by a fresh and more violent shaking, followed, too, by the fresh rending of a tough wool garment. In the dim light, they could see the intruder totter and wobble unsteadily to and fro. Then, when he was upright once more, and free save for the monster clinging to his raiment, he spoke, not threateningly, not profanely, but in one simple word, low and quiet and yet curiously insistent in its cadence.

"Julia!" was all he said.

And then it was that Buddie and Teresa were filled with a swift terror lest Miss Julia had gone mad. Dropping their interlocking arms, dropping the train of her long, pale frock, she flung herself directly upon the intruder who, although tottering beneath Ebenezer's latest onslaught, yet contrived to catch her in his arms.

"Brooks!" she said. And then she burst out crying on his shoulder, while Ebenezer, his teeth still shut upon the garment, sat down on the gravel and

stared up at them both in hopeless, helpless astonishment.

It was Teresa who finally discovered that she had a voice, and used it.

"It's that insurance man come back again," she whispered. "Come, Buddie, let's go."

And Buddie went. In his haste and in his mental agitation, however, he totally neglected to call off Ebenezer. Therefore Ebenezer continued to sit there in the gravel, his teeth clinched through a tattered section of black broadcloth, and his great gray eyes alight with happiness that he had caught and held this intruder, over whose capture Miss Julia was shedding so many happy tears. After this, Ebenezer was reflecting smugly, he could maul Pet-Lamb and upset the tea table to his heart's content, himself unpunished and unscathed.

In this belief, his logic was unimpeachable. Once and for all time, it had been given to the tousled Ebenezer to make good.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### BUDDIE'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

"AUNT JULIA, how do you do your Christmas?" Buddie queried, as he came dashing into the dining-room at luncheon time.

Miss Julia roused herself from the happy dream in which, to Buddie, looking on, it seemed as if she had been living, ever since she had heard and recognized the voice of Ebenezer's captive, a dozen nights before. Buddie was glad of the happiness; but he disapproved of dreams on principle. If facts were facts, and good, one might as well wake up to the full enjoyment of them.

That the facts were good, however, there was very little room for question now in the mind of any one. Miss Julia, though, was not asking many questions. She was merely living along from day to day in a mood of supreme content. What mind she had to spare from the contemplation of her present happiness, she gave up to self-congratulation that her old-time prejudices had vanished; that, in those past few months, she had grown too broad to submit to the cramping of her life within its former narrow lines. And that broadening: had it come in part from Buddie? Or, perchance, had Ebenezer had a frowsy paw in it, too?

Ebenezer, clothed in yards upon yards of new necktie, was bearing himself proudly in these latter

days. His appetites were pampered, until he waddled fatly. His tangle-covered ears were stuffed with praises of his great wisdom in discovering and seizing the one guest of all the world whom Miss Julia would have been most loath to miss by reason of her absence, in holding him fast, albeit not too respectfully, and in lifting up his voice to call the missing hostess back to her social duties. Just how or why the unexpected guest had put himself in Ebenezer's way, as yet had not been fully explained. Buddie, with implicit confidence in Ebenezer's genius, insisted upon it that, passing in the street outside, he had been pounced upon and dragged up to Miss Julia's very portal. Miss Julia blushed becomingly and vaguely talked about special providences, the while she caressed the frowsy head as it lay in her lap. As for the guest himself, he merely shut his jaws for an occasional minute. The rest of the time, he was busy, urging upon Miss Julia the prompt adoption of certain of his plans.

December had come by now, and cold and storm, and with them all had also come a degree of skating. Down in the Hamilton orchard, the brook no longer chattered; either it grumbled, or else was silent absolutely. The playhouse was deserted, except on Saturdays when Teresa made up her weekly fire in the kitchen stove and, in the intervals of cooking luncheon, stitched away upon the mysterious bits of work which invariably herald the approach of Christmas.

Thither, one December morning, Buddie had followed her, quite uninvited. He had entered, upon the very heels of his own knock upon the door; but he was too intent on brushing the light snow out of

Ebenezer's tresses to pay any great attention to the panic-stricken fashion in which Teresa, at his coming, doubled her work into a bundle and, lacking other hiding-place, sat down on top of it.

"What doing?" Buddie asked her tersely, as soon as he could disengage his mind from Ebenezer.

"Watching the kettle boil."

"Hh! With your thimble on?"

Teresa had the grace to blush. Then she remembered suddenly that fibs are quite allowable at Christmas time.

"I was sewing up a rip," she replied mendaciously.

Buddie fished in the depths of his trouser pocket.

"Oh, I say, that reminds me," he said suddenly. Then he eyed the handful of assorted trifles he had brought forth, shook his head and laid them on the table, preparatory to another descent into the pocket.

"Well?" Teresa inquired, as her eyes rested disdainfully upon the motley collection outspread before her.

"Wait a jiffy, unless I've lost it. No. Yes. No; here it is." And Buddie produced a button, rather sticky and with a number of crumbs clinging to its concave surface. "Would you very much mind sewing this on for me, Teresa? I'll do as much for you, some day."

"Doubted." Teresa laughed at his pleading accent. "That is, if you attempt it with a needle. Where does it go, Buddie?"

"The top one but one. Wait, though, I'll take it off." And Buddie, shorn of his coat, sat down on the floor beside the stove. "For a fact, you're a good soul, Teresa. I hated like thunder to ask you; but

Aunt Julia is in such a twitter, these days, that it seemed a shame to haul her down to anything so rubbishy as buttons."

"It might depend a little bit upon the button, though," Teresa observed rebukingly, as she prodded with her needle at the sticky mass that clogged the button's holes.

This time, it was Buddie 's turn to blush. He did it with so good a will that his hair faded, by comparison with his face.

"I could n't help it, if the doughnut crumbled," he defended himself.

"Doughnut! Buddie!" Teresa's accent was disdainful.

"Yes. Two for five, with sugar on. They're licking good, too," Buddie assured her.

Her needle threaded and lifted for the stroke, Teresa paused and looked down at him in a vain attempt at chastened patience.

"How coarse you boys' tastes are!" she said.

Buddie crossed his feet, tailor-wise, and came to rigid attention.

"They are n't, too," he contradicted. "Every boy that's half a boy eats doughnuts."

Teresa gave a patient sigh.

"Have n't I got nine brothers?" she asked Buddie. "I should think I ought to know." And then, with the same air of chastened patience, she put down the needle and the coat, rose and crossed the room to the small pantry in the corner. "Here, try these," she said. "Are n't they as good as the two-for-five ones, Buddie?"

Buddie, with an ecstatic bounce and scramble, fell upon the contents of the plate in her hands.

"Bet you!" he said uncouthly. "Where 'd you get 'em?"

"I made them, myself. I've only just aired out the room, after the frying." Teresa seated herself once more with anxious haste.

"Look out!" Buddie warned her swiftly. "You're sitting on something."

"Only a new cushion. This chair has been so hard," Teresa reassured him tranquilly. Then she sought to create a diversion. "Won't you have another?"

"Dozens more, if I may." Buddie held up his plate appealingly.

Too late, Teresa realized her dilemma. It was desirable, all things considered, that she should not quit her chair again during Buddie's visit; but the pantry was in the farther corner of the room. Not even the long arm of justice could reach so far as that. She chose the lesser ill.

"All right. Help yourself," she told him rashly. Later on, however, she doubted the wisdom of her choice.

"Aunt Julia 's gone out driving," Buddie said, when once more he could speak distinctly.

Teresa shivered.

"This cold day?"

"She had on furs enough to keep warm. She was going by the shore road, too, and that 's sunny."

"With her insurance man?" Teresa queried.

"Yes; only he does n't do insurance any more; it's engineering now."

"How can he?" Teresa inquired skeptically. "He's too old to have been to college since."

Buddie turned literal.

"Since what?"

Teresa shrank from the downright word. Instead, —

"Since that other time I told you about," she said evasively. "And he was too old to go to college even then, so how can he engineer?"

Buddie spoke out a truth which is too often disregarded.

"College is n't the only canning shop, Teresa. The *can* that's in a fellow is born there, not read out of books."

"Maybe. But I did n't suppose — How soon do you think they will?" Teresa made fragmentary rejoinder, as she tossed the coat, button and all, down across Buddie's knees.

"Not till after Christmas, anyhow. By the way, Teresa," Buddie, one arm inside his coat, looked up in sudden question; "how does Aunt Julia manage Christmas? So far, she has n't said a thing about it."

Teresa's reply was wiser than she knew.

"She lets it manage her, I think. Anyway, she never seems to do very much about it, beyond having Lena hang holly in the windows."

Buddie rose to his feet.

"Well, anyhow, she's got to do something about it, this year, or my name's not Buddie!"

"It is n't," Teresa reminded him quite unexpectedly.

Buddie glared at her in good-tempered despair.

"Will — you— shut — up?" he said slowly. "It's no end mean to take it out upon a fellow because his ancestors were lunatics. Besides, if you keep calling me an earnest angel, before you know it, I

may turn into one, and then who'd play with you?"

"I don't worry yet," Teresa reassured him. "By the way, speaking of angels, what about the scouts?"

Buddie sat down again, this time on the edge of the table.

"We're going on, the same way we have been," he said decisively. "If the other fellow does n't like it, he can lump it, and cut us off his list. We are n't afraid to walk alone, especially as we were the first ones in the field. Moreover," as he spoke, he rose and chirruped to Ebenezer who had been slumbering on his back against the wall, his paws extended stiffly towards the ceiling; "moreover, I don't know but there is as much good scouting sense in taking what is given to you and being grateful, as there is in making such a rumpus because it is n't just exactly like the paper pattern of what somebody else has got." And then he swung about upon his heel and left the room, with Ebenezer trudging after him.

That noon, he put to Miss Julia his question concerning Christmas. Miss Julia answered him, after the slightest pause possible, answered him with another question.

"How do you like best to do it, Buddie?" she asked him, in his own vernacular.

Buddie's reply was succinct.

"Make a grand row," he told her.

And once again Miss Julia answered in the vernacular.

"All right," she said. "Let's."

And the worst of it all was, she took quite as a matter of course this deviation from her old-time

paths of decorum, both in her speech and in the making up of her social plans.

In the making up of her present social plans, as far as these concerned the Christmas celebration, Buddie took an active part. Up to now, Miss Julia had celebrated Christmas chiefly by means of holly wreaths and her check book. Now and then she added a plum pudding; but that was really all. This year, Buddie ordained flatly, it must be quite different. There must be a surprise basket on Christmas eve, with the three older Hamiltons, and Pet-Lamb, and Ebenezer, and Ebenezer's recent captive; granted, Buddie added with a giggle, that he could get his evening raiment patched in time. Next day, Christmas, must be a great day of it, with stockings, and a dinner with the same people and some more, people like Captain Paddock, for instance, who would n't be having larks at home, and then a tree at night. And there should be a blazing big pudding, and heaps of tinsel things on the tree, and presents for Teresa and Pet-Lamb and Sandy, and holly in all the windows and green wreaths twisted around the verandah posts. And then, if only there would come a snowstorm, it would begin to be quite worth while.

As the days went by, not went with clockwork and according to the calendar, but rushed and skurried, it came about that more and more it was Buddie who made the plans, Miss Julia who sat by and took notes of them and thought out the way to execute them. As the days went by, too, Miss Julia found herself becoming more and more interested in the coming festival. Her interest did not wane, moreover, after reading the letter from Daddy,

which she found beside her plate, one morning. The letter had vanished, when Buddie pranced into the room, a little later, too eager over his latest scheme to notice what a smile-y, teary Miss Julia it was, who looked up at his greeting.

Later, Miss Julia read the letter over twice, to make sure that she understood all of its instructions. She was anxious to follow them out the more implicitly, because she had been struck, in listening to Buddie's Christmas plans, by the curious way in which he seemed to ignore himself in making up his detailed arrangements for the festive season, now almost at hand.

And then the almost became the actual, and Christmas eve dawned, still and gray, with flakes of snow hanging apparently motionless in the quiet air. Buddie was up betimes. Indeed, it was long before the first streak of dawning gray that Miss Julia lifted her head to listen to the clatter of boyish heels upon the stairs, to the muffled bark of Ebenezer, as he went plunging joyously down upon his master's heels. Her sleepy head sank back again upon the pillow, and her perfunctory little sigh came from between smiling lips. How still and calm and — well, she might as well confess it — bored had been her household, on last year's Christmas morning! And now? Miss Julia's smile grew, until a little dimple came into sight beside her lips, as she wondered happily whether the old, dull boredom would ever come back to her again. Last year, she had sent Buddie a check for ten dollars "from his affectionate aunt, Julia F. Tenney." This year — Well, Miss Julia, at this belated time of life, had gone into Christmas shopping with a vengeance.

Buddie left the table, that night, with a vague notion that Miss Julia had made a mistake and served up the Christmas dinner, a day too early. Beside him, Sandy had eaten like a glutton, for dainties such as were offered him, that night, were unknown quantities in a household like the Hamiltons'. Teresa, as the senior of her brothers, had taken the occasion with a temperate sedateness; but even Eric had yielded to the prevailing spirit of good cheer, and had responded cordially, when the ex-insurance man had tried to draw him into talk, so cordially, indeed, that later on, that evening, the ex-insurance man confided to Miss Julia his belief that the little Hamilton had it in him to make something.

But the best of dinners must come to an end at last; and, as Buddie was quite well aware, even better things were to follow after this one. How much better, though, he was unaware as yet. Else, he might have starved himself unduly in his haste to reach them.

The surprise basket was waiting for them, when they went into the drawing-room, a great willow clothes basket heaped with all manner of gay parcels. Everybody had some, from the ex-insurance man to Pet-Lamb; and Ebenezer had at least a dozen. Opened one by one as they came from the basket, they proved to hold all sorts of jokes and pretty trifles, the things that cost so little to give and are so wonderfully good to get. Last of all, down in the very bottom of the basket was a wee scarlet package for Buddie, one no larger than a pill box. Indeed, he opened it to find a little box, a scarlet one. Inside the box was a folded card, and

on the card these words, neatly printed in scarlet ink, —

"I am hidden in the library," it said. "Come quick, and find me."

Buddie's face lost its mockery, grew puzzled; then it lighted.

"Jove!" he said tersely. "Come along, Ebenezer." And he went racing out of the room, while Miss Julia and the ex-insurance man exchanged a meaning glance behind him.

There was the shortest possible interval of silence, and then a whoop of utter rapture. A moment afterwards, Buddie came tearing back into the room, breathless and dragging his present after him.

"It 's Daddy!" he shouted, above the strident observations which Ebenezer was offering upon the selfsame subject. "It 's Daddy; and, what 's a whole lot more, he has come home to stay!"

THE END.

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